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THE HEART OF ISRAEL

"As I had much rather hear a saint speak than behold his works, even so would I yet much rather spy his heart and the treasure in his soul, than hear his words. And this the Psalter enables us to do most plentifully."
—Martin Luther.

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THE HEART OF ISRAEL

An Approach to the Book of Psalms

BY

GEORGE W. THORN

AUTHOR OF
"THE PROPHETS OF ISRAEL AND THEIR MESSAGE FOR TO-DAY"
AND "VISIONS OF HOPE AND FEAR"

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PREFATORY NOTE

This book originated in a series of addresses given at week-day services, the notes of which were afterwards used in teaching a class for definite Bible-study. It has been written in the hope that it may serve a similar double purpose and be found useful both to general readers and to Bible-classes and study-circles. If it is made the basis of definite study it should be supplemented by one good Commentary, at least, and for this purpose either Kirkpatrick's or that by Davison and Witton Davies may be specially recommended. These and other books to which reference may be made are mentioned in the Bibliography on p. 165. Biblical quotations throughout this book are given in the words of the Revised Version (text or margin) except where otherwise stated.

Any reader who is not interested in questions concerning the origin and authorship of the Psalms may pass from the third paragraph of the first chapter to the beginning of the third chapter.

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Chapter I

THE HYMN-BOOK OF THE JEWISH CHURCH

" When you watch religion at work, you find a morality ; when you converse with religion in its thoughtful moods, you find a theology ; but whenever you get to the heart of religion you find a song."—PERCY AINSWORTH.

CHAPTER I

THE HYMN-BOOK OF THE JEWISH CHURCH

"WHAT the heart is in man, that the Psalter is in the Bible."[1] So runs one of the many pregnant estimates devout scholars have formed of this book, and its profound truth may well serve to suggest the attitude in which we approach our subject. In the Book of Psalms we touch the pulsating centre of the religious life which the whole Bible expresses and which is one with the deepest spiritual experience of men through all the ages. Here are the profoundest emotions and highest aspirations of the human soul, voiced in a language which can never grow old. Here are the cries of penitence, the outpourings of sorrow, the lamentations of despair, which are wrung from men overcome by the shame of sin or the agony of suffering. Here, too, are expressed the raptures which men feel in their purest moments of divine revelation and blessing; the mighty hopes which throb within them and inspire them to toil and struggle and venture everything for the ideal which shines before them; all the varied strains which are evoked when the full-strung chords of being are swept by the breath of

[1] Johann Arndt.

the Divine Spirit. It is no wonder that this book has always been for many "a Bible within the Bible." Of it they have been able to say, as Coleridge said of the whole Bible, "I have found words for my inmost thoughts, songs for my joy, utterances for my hidden griefs, and pleadings for my shame and feebleness."[1] If we are to judge the inspiration of the Bible by the way we find God drawing near to us and speaking to our hearts as we read it, then there is no part of it the inspiration of which we shall be less disposed to question than the Book of Psalms.

In this brief study we shall not deal with the Psalms separately but with the collection as a whole. The nearest analogy to the Book of Psalms among modern literary productions is a hymn-book, and if we describe it as "The Hymn-Book of the Jewish Church" we shall find we have a useful starting-point from which we may explore the rich treasure it contains for devotion and worship.

A hymn-book differs from an anthology of sacred poetry in that it is designed mainly for public worship in which the compositions included are intended to be sung. It may also be a very valuable aid to private devotion and may well include some compositions which are more suitable for private than public use, but it is as an instrument of common worship that it comes into existence. A great variety of thought and feeling may be represented in it, but it should all be such as contributes to the attitude and act of worship. There may be adoration and thanksgiving; commemoration of divine

[1] *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, p. 45.

mercies; prayers of penitence, supplication and intercession; devout meditations and aspirations; but the note of worship is that which justifies their place in a hymn-book. It is doubtful, however, if any hymn-book has ever been compiled which strictly conforms to this principle and, as we shall see later on, the Book of Psalms is one in which a wide latitude of selection is allowed. But that it is, as a whole, rightly to be regarded as a hymn-book there is clear evidence.

Indications of this may be recognised in the titles of many of the Psalms and that adopted for the whole collection. These titles are not part of the Psalms themselves and cannot be assumed to have been prefixed at the time of their original composition. They have been added by or at the time the individual Psalms have been gathered into collections. So, while any information they appear to give about the origin or history of Psalms must be considered on its merits, no hesitation need be felt in accepting such evidence as they afford with regard to the purpose or use of the Psalms when included in the collection.

One Psalm, the 145th, is entitled "A Praise," and this word has been taken, in the Hebrew scriptures, as the title of the whole book. It is called simply "Praises" or "The Book of Praises." Fifty-seven Psalms have another word for their title which means a song sung to instrumental accompaniment. The Greek version of the Old Testament rendered this by the word *psalmos*, meaning a song sung to the harp or other stringed instrument, and it was adopted in its plural form as the title of the whole

collection. Our English Bible has received this word, through the Latin, without attempting to translate it. A similar but rather more general title is given to thirty Psalms and is rendered *Song* in the English version. All these titles suggest that the Psalms were collected, even if not written, for the purpose of being sung. Other titles carry the suggestion further.

Many of the Psalms have titles in which the name of some individual or official occurs. These titles will be discussed in our next chapter, but two of them have a direct bearing upon our present subject and for that purpose must be considered here. Twelve Psalms[1] are headed "Of the sons of Korah." The A.V. translates "For the sons of Korah." The preposition indicates a very general relationship and may be translated by *to*, *of* or *for*. We shall best understand it in the sense of *belonging to*. Now, from the Book of Chronicles,[2] we learn that the "Sons of Korah" was the name of one of the guilds or choirs of temple singers. In what sense did these Psalms belong to this choir? It cannot be that the choir collectively composed them, although it is conceivable that individual members of the choir may have done so. But other names as well occur in the titles of some of these Psalms—the Chief Musician and Heman the Ezrahite—each with the same preposition in front of it, and certainly the same Psalm cannot have been written by different individuals. The natural explanation is that these Psalms were found in a collection which the Sons

[1] Counting Psalms xlii. and xliii. as two, though they are really one.
[2] 2 Chron. xx. 19.

of Korah used in their service of praise in the Temple.

But, as we have just noted, the name of another person concerned with the music of the Temple is found in the titles of some of these Psalms and it is attached also to many others—fifty-five in all. Our English version translates the title of this official as "Chief Musician"; we should call him the conductor or choirmaster. Here again we must understand the preposition as meaning *belonging to* and indicating a collection which bore the name of the chief musical officer of the Temple. Where both the titles occur we may take it that the Psalm to which they are attached had a place in each of these collections.

Many of the Chief Musician's Psalms include certain musical directions in their titles. Some of these refer to instruments by which the Psalms are to be accompanied. Seven mention stringed instruments (Psalms iv., vi., liv., lv., lxi., lxvii., lxxvi.) and one (Psalm v.) wind instruments. In the titles of Psalms vi. and xii. we find the direction "set to the Sheminith" and in that of Psalm xlvi. "set to Alamoth." These terms may indicate the voices which are to sing the Psalms in question, for the former phrase means "after the manner of maidens" and suggests the soprano,[1] while the latter means "after the manner of the eighth" and suggests

[1] If so, probably the male falsetto. Though there are references to singing women in 2 Chron. xxxv. 25, Ezra ii. 65, and Neh. vii. 67, it is doubtful if women were ever used in the Temple service. If they were the practice had ceased by the time the Book of Chronicles was written. In the Herodian temple Levite boys were employed and they would sing the soprano parts.

the bass. More probably, however, they refer to the instruments which are to be used as the accompaniment and this seems to be borne out by a reference in Chronicles to "psalteries set to Alamoth" and "harps set to the Sheminith."[1] "The Gittith" mentioned in the title of three Psalms (viii., lxxxi. and lxxxiv.) may also refer to some musical instrument, but the meaning of the word is obscure.[2]

Another interesting series of phrases occurring in these titles probably gives the names of tunes to which the Psalms concerned were to be sung. Just as we indicate a tune by the opening words of the hymn or song with which it is associated, so did the Temple choirmasters. And just as the tunes of popular songs are sometimes taken for hymns to-day so it was in Jerusalem in the days of the second Temple. They sang the 22nd Psalm to the tune of a song known as "The hind of the morning"; the 56th to "The dove of the distant terebinths." Four Psalms (lvii., lviii., lix. and lxxv.) are set to "Destroy not," perhaps a vintage song beginning "Destroy it not for a blessing is in it," quoted in Isaiah.[3] Other phrases, the meanings of which are uncertain, occur in the titles of Psalms ix., liii. and lxxxviii., and are probably also names of tunes. But when we speak of "tunes" in this connection we must not think of anything like what we call a "tune" to-day. Judging from ancient folk-songs

[1] 1 Chron. xv. 20, 21.

[2] It may refer to the tune, for a Rabbinic comment on these Psalms says that it refers to the words of Joel iii. 13, which are possibly a quotation from some popular vintage song.

[3] Isa. lxv. 8.

which still survive amongst the Arabs, the rhythmical element must have dominated ancient Hebrew music in such a manner that little consideration was given to melody. Singing was probably, at first, a kind of declamatory recitative and when harmony was added it only meant singing one part an octave lower than the other. The melodies used consisted probably of three or four notes at the most and of two bars which would be repeated as often as required. This would allow verses of different length and measure to be sung to the same "tune."[1]

Another musical direction is found seventy-one times, not in the titles but in the Psalms themselves. It is the term *Selah*. The word means *Lift up*, but its precise interpretation is doubtful. It may be a direction to the musicians to play louder or to strike up with an interlude during a pause in the singing.[2] Or it may be a direction to the congregation that at this point they are to lift up their voices in a benediction or doxology such as

> Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
> From everlasting and to everlasting.
> Amen and Amen.[3]

Our knowledge of the use of the Psalms in the worship of the Temple is not derived only from the Book itself. We have already made some references to the Books of Chronicles. These were written

[1] See Oesterley: *Psalms in the Jewish Church*, 34 ff.

[2] In Ps. ix. 16 the word *Higgaion* occurs as well as *Selah*. This word occurs again in the text of Ps. xcii. 3 where it is translated *with a solemn sound*. As a musical direction it probably meant that the instrumental accompaniment or interlude was to be of a solemn character.

[3] Ps. xli. 13, cf. 1 Chron. xvi. 36 and Neh. ix. 5.

towards the close of the third century B.C. and they give an elaborate and detailed description of the worship of the second Temple—that which was erected by the Jews after the return from the Babylonian captivity. From this description we find that the service of praise was especially rich, and long quotations from the Psalms[1] are given as examples of the praises that were sung. Another glimpse of the Temple service as it was performed about the year 200 B.C. is afforded to us by the *Wisdom of Jesus the Son of Sirach*, generally known as *Ecclesiasticus*. It portrays, with ardent enthusiasm, the high priest of that day, Simeon the Just, officiating in his "glorious robes" surrounded by "all the sons of Aaron in their glory." After describing how he poured out the drink-offering at the foot of the altar, it goes on :

> Then shouted the sons of Aaron,
> They sounded the trumpets of beaten work,
> They made a great noise to be heard,
> For a remembrance before the Most High.
> Then all the people together hasted,
> And fell down upon the earth on their faces
> To worship their Lord, the Almighty God Most High.
> The singers also praised him with their voices ;
> In the whole house was there made sweet melody.[2]

A later work, the great collection of Laws and commentaries thereon known as *The Talmud*, gives a good deal of information as to the use of the Psalms in the service of the Herodian Temple and we may fairly assume that much of this usage was observed in the second Temple. One Psalm was selected for

[1] See 1 Chron. xvi. 8-36.

[2] Ecclus. l. 16-18.

each day of the week, to be sung at the offering of the sacrifices. That for the Sabbath was the 92nd and this is indicated by the title to it still preserved in our Bible. The others, beginning with the first day of the week, were Psalms xxiv., xlviii., lxxxii., xciv., lxxxi. and xciii. There were also special Psalms for festivals, the most important of which were the six Psalms (cxiii.-cxviii.) known as the "Hallel." The word means "Praise" and it was used as the title of this group of Psalms because it so often occurs in them in the form "Hallelujah," or "Praise ye the LORD." The Hallel was sung at the Feasts of Passover, Tabernacles, Weeks and Dedication. Other Psalms were specially selected for certain Feasts; amongst them is Psalm xxx., the title of which, as we have it still, shows that it was to be used at the Feast of Dedication. There are fifteen Psalms (cxx.-cxxxiv.), forming a separate little collection, which were probably sung not by the Levites in the Temple but by the pilgrims as they went up to Jerusalem three times a year for the great Festivals enjoined in the Deuteronomic law.[1] For this reason they were entitled "Songs of Ascents" or "Pilgrim Songs."

From the time of the Exile, Jewish religion developed another institution for worship besides the Temple. This was the Synagogue, and originally it came into existence for the study of the Law rather than for worship. But to that study prayer was added and later on singing was introduced. In course of time the Synagogue service was made to conform to the service of the Temple, prayers

[1] Deut. xvi. 16.

taking the place of sacrifices. The singing of Psalms was an important part of the service and the use of the daily Psalms and the special Festival Psalms was observed in the Synagogue as in the Temple. In more modern times other hymns have been composed and are used in the Jewish Synagogue, as in the Christian Church, but the use of the Psalms has been maintained through all the centuries.

There are, however, many Psalms which are not used in the regular services of the modern synagogue. Some of these are used in those occasional services which are of a more personal character, such as Marriage and Burial services and that for the observance of the rite of Circumcision. Others are used in private on special occasions such as childbirth, sickness, or death; when a house is built or when a tombstone is set up; during the binding on of phylacteries or on undertaking a journey.[1] These usages of the modern synagogue may serve to illustrate the very varied manner in which the Psalms have always been employed in the religious life of the Jews.

But though so much of this is the usage of prayer, and often of private or family prayer, it does not invalidate the claim that the collection as a whole is to be regarded as a hymn-book. In the use of modern hymns it is very difficult to draw any clear line between those which are only suitable for private devotion and those which may be sung in common worship. Charles Wesley's "Jesu, Lover of my soul" was written simply for personal use in times of

[1] Much interesting information on these and similar points may be found in Oesterley's *Psalms in the Jewish Church*, Chap. X.

temptation but there are few hymns which have been so widely used in public worship, and of which the use has been so greatly blessed. The late Canon Ellerton, whose authority on questions of hymnology must be treated with great respect, objected to its use in the ordinary worship of a mixed congregation but he said, "I should think that all those who have really felt its wonderful power and reality would wish to see it in a Church Hymnal."[1] Whether one sympathises with Canon Ellerton's objection or not his words serve to illustrate the point that the criterion of suitability for public worship cannot be applied in any rigid and arbitrary manner to the compositions selected for inclusion in a hymn-book. It may well be that when the Psalms were collected the needs of those who went up to the Temple to pray were considered as well as the requirements of the public service of praise. And, in any case, the claim of the present chapter is not that the Book of Psalms is completely described, but that it is helpfully approached, as the Hymn-Book of the Jewish Church.

[1] John Ellerton: *Life and Writings on Hymnology*, p. 236.

Chapter II

THE GROWTH OF THE HYMN-BOOK

"A sacred poetry of such popular origin must necessarily reflect the religious life, not of one or two great poets, but of Israel as a nation in all the vicissitudes of a long history; and a judicious criticism learns to seek in the Psalter, not merely the autobiography of David, but a long and weighty chapter in the life of the Old Testament Church."—W. Robertson Smith.

CHAPTER II

THE GROWTH OF THE HYMN-BOOK

One of the best-known hymn-books in use to-day is *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, and that title might serve as a description of most collections of hymns which now find any considerable place in the worship of the Christian Church. Their contents are not the work of a single individual, but are chosen by editors who bring forth out of their treasuries things new and old. Earlier collections are drawn upon, or included in their entirety, and some of these may have been the work of a single poet. But additions are made from other sources, some of which may not originally have been intended for use as hymns. They may be short lyrics of purely individual emotion or they may be stanzas selected from longer poems. They may be taken from published works already familiar to a wide circle of readers, or they may be compositions that have not previously been published. But they are all gathered into one collection and their place in it provides a certain standard by which their use and meaning is thenceforth determined.

To fit selections from such varied sources into a hymn-book suited for the worship of a particular period of its history, means that there must be

much adaptation of a more or less unconscious character and some amount of deliberate and conscious revision. Purely personal and local circumstances reflected in the poems will tend to be forgotten; metaphors and imagery suggested by such circumstances will be interpreted afresh and given a wider meaning. Lines and phrases which are not easily adapted to general use in this way may be altered. Some verses may be omitted altogether and others may be added, especially such as are of the nature of benedictions or doxologies. There is no deception or dishonesty in all this. It is part of the natural process by which the wealth of sacred poetry and song produced through the ages is made available for the piety and devotion of the living Church.[1]

To some such process as this the present form of the Book of Psalms is due. There is abundant evidence that it is the outcome of the work of many inspired poets and devout editors who, through centuries of Jewish history, enriched the religious life

[1] Canon Ellerton's defence of a practice which it is a literary fashion of to-day to condemn, may be quoted :—" By the *best* form I do not mean necessarily the *original* form of a hymn. There is much confusion of thought on this point. A hymn-book—a book for congregational use—has only one object; and everything in it ought to be made subservient to that one object. It is the material for Common Praise. It is not a 'treasury' of religious poetry. . . . A composition may have in it, as it leaves the author's hands, the elements of a valuable hymn while yet it may need to pass through other hands, perhaps through many, before it reaches its best shape. The author may have intended it only for private use, or only to express his own passing thoughts; his work may be deformed by the effects of imperfect education, of a dull ear for rhythm, of narrow religious prejudices, of a vulgar or rhetorical style; and yet a wise and devout Hymnologist will at once detect in it the true metal, which, properly purified, will, it may be, circulate in the Church to the end of time." John Ellerton: *Life and Writings on Hymnology*, pp. 208-9.

and worship of the people and provided the forms by which it might be nurtured and expressed in generations yet to come.

In dealing with the use of the Psalms in the worship of the Temple we have already had occasion to show that there are other collections of Psalms lying behind the Book of Psalms as we have it now. We have seen that there was a collection which went by the name of a guild of Temple musicians known as the *Sons of Korah* and another collection which was known as the *Chief Musician's*, and that sometimes the same Psalm was found in both collections. These, however, are not the only collections of Psalms indicated by the titles which survive. There are twelve Psalms (l. and lxxiii.-lxxxiii) bearing the name of Asaph, who, according to the Book of Chronicles,[1] was one of the principal musicians originally appointed by David to lead the service of praise in the Temple. A choir came into existence bearing his name, as in the case of Korah, and is frequently referred to as the *Sons of Asaph*.[2] It is, therefore, natural to suppose that these twelve Psalms are taken from a collection belonging to that choir, similar to those which bear the name of the *Sons of Korah*.

In the same way the title *Of David* which is attached to many of the Psalms may be regarded as the name of a collection from which these have been taken. Of the existence of such a collection there is additional evidence in the words which

[1] 1 Chron. vi. 39; xv. 17; xvi. 5 ff.; 2 Chron. v. 12.
[2] 1 Chron. xxv. 1 ff.; 2 Chron. v. 12; xx. 14; xxix. 13; xxxv. 15; Ezra ii. 41; iii. 10; Neh. vii. 44; xi. 22.

follow Psalm lxxii.: "The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended." This is not part of the 72nd Psalm (which happens to be entitled *Of Solomon*) but is evidently a colophon marking the end of a collection of Psalms, bearing David's name, and designed specially as a Prayer-book. It is not necessary, however, to assume that the whole of the seventy-four Psalms which now have David's name in their title were in this book. It is possible that there were two collections at least bearing David's name and in some instances (especially those which occur in Books iv. and v. of the Psalter) it is probable that the name was added to the Psalm at a later stage when larger and more comprehensive collections were made.

It is not, however, from the titles alone that we have evidence of the existence of earlier collections on which our present Book of Psalms has drawn. There are double occurrences of the same Psalm which point to a combination of collections in each of which it was found. Psalm cviii. is composed of Psalms lvii. 7-11 and lx. 5-12. Psalms liii. and lxx. are repetitions of Psalms xiv. and xl. 13-17. In the last two instances a significant change occurs in the Divine name that is used. Psalm xiv. speaks of "the LORD" (Jehovah) but Psalm liii. changes the word to "God" (Elohim). Psalm lxx. retains "the LORD" twice where it is found in Psalm xl., but in three other cases where the word occurs it is altered to "God." Now the predominance of "God" as the Divine name is characteristic of the group of Psalms xlii. to lxxxiii. and the fact that the name has been changed in the two cases where we have Psalms repeated suggests that the preference

for this word is due to an editor who gathered these Psalms into a separate collection.[1]

Further indications of later and larger collections are to be found in the doxologies which occur in Psalms xli. 13 and lxxxix. 52. These are not part of the Psalms at the foot of which they stand, but independent ascriptions of praise such as were customarily employed by devout writers to conclude their books. In Psalm cl. we have an enlarged form of doxology marking the conclusion of the whole Psalter. This division of the Book of Psalms into three collections reflects the last stages of the process of its development before it attained its final unity. After that it was at some time divided into five books in accordance with the analogy of the five books of the Law. This was accomplished by taking the doxology of Psalm lxxii. 18 and 19, which originally marked the end of the earlier and smaller collection of "The prayers of David," to divide the second part into two, and the doxology of Psalm cvi. 48, which is an integral part of the Psalm itself, to divide the third part. Thus the five "Books" marked in the Hebrew Bible and shown in our Revised Version were obtained.[2]

Having seen that the personal names which are

[1] Another indication of this is the phrase "God, my God," or "God, thy God" peculiar to these Psalms. It would originally be "The LORD" (Jehovah) my (or thy) God. See Psalms xliii. 4; xlv. 7; l. 7.

[2] For detailed discussion of the various stages in the formation of the Psalter and the periods to which they belong, reference may be made to the Introduction to either of the commentaries mentioned in the Bibliography. The process was probably complete early in the second century B.C., though some scholars, believing that a considerable number of the Psalms are of Maccabean origin, put the date half a century or more later.

found in the titles of the Psalms are often those which belong to collections which were drawn upon at various stages of the process of compilation which resulted in the complete Psalter, we may now ask if such names give us any indication as to the authorship of the individual Psalms in the collections. With regard to those bearing the names of Asaph and the *Sons of Korah* the question is of little interest for, even if the title does mean more than that the Psalms concerned were in a collection belonging to the choirs which Asaph and Korah founded, we know nothing about individual members of those choirs. But when we turn to the Psalms which bear David's name the position is very different.

David is always regarded, in the Old Testament, as the founder of psalmody in Israel, but the oldest references to him in this connection mention the music rather than the words of psalmody. In the Book of Samuel[1] his skill in playing is mentioned and by the time of Amos his "instruments,"[2] or more probably the melodies that he composed upon them, had become proverbial. At a much later period Chronicles attributes the organisation of the musical service of the Temple to him, and Nehemiah[3] refers to his "musical instruments." The familiar phrase "the sweet psalmist of Israel"[4] applied to David is due to a mistranslation and should be rendered, as in the R.V. margin, "pleasant

[1] 1 Sam. xvi. 18.

[2] Amos vi. 5. A slight emendation gives "melodies" instead of "instruments." Moffatt renders the passage "Composing airs like David himself."

[3] Neh. xii. 36.

[4] 2 Sam. xxiii. 1.

in the psalms of Israel."[1] There is, however, one very early piece of evidence that David could write songs as well as sing them or accompany them with instrumental music. The elegy on Saul and Jonathan is quoted in Samuel[2] from the old collection of Hebrew poetry known as the Book of Jashar, and there is no reason whatever to question its ascription to David. Another song is attributed to David in Samuel[3] and is found again amongst the Psalms,[4] but this, together with "The last words of David" which follows, does not belong to the original form of that book. Not only is it found in an appendix comprising the last four chapters, but it has apparently been inserted after the appendix was written, for it breaks into the middle of the story of David's heroes.[5] It does not therefore necessarily provide any fresh and independent evidence as to authorship beyond what the title offers in the Book of Psalms.

Now in addition to Psalm xviii. there are twelve others which are referred, by their titles, to some occasion in the life of David recorded in the Books of Samuel. Some of these Psalms express emotions and aspirations which are entirely appropriate to the situation to which the title refers. In others the appropriateness is not obvious, or concerns only a portion of the Psalm, while other references plainly point to entirely different circumstances. We cannot, therefore, assume that the tradition

[1] Moffatt renders it: "Whom Israel's lyrics love to sing." Sir G. A. Smith renders it: "Darling of Israel's chants." (*Early Poetry of Israel*, p. 95.)

[2] 2 Sam. i. 19-27. [3] 2 Sam. xxii. 2 ff. [4] Ps. xviii.

[5] 2 Sam. xxiii. 8 evidently follows xxi. 22.

which is embodied in such titles is proof of Davidic authorship. In a good many other Psalms bearing the Davidic title situations and circumstances are described totally dissimilar to any in which we can conceive David ever to have been placed. Some of them refer quite explicitly to the time of the Return from Captivity, and in some Aramaic words and phrases occur, which prove beyond any possibility of doubt that they were written many centuries after David lived. So then, while the Jewish tradition which regarded David as the founder of Psalmody, and which eventually led to the whole Psalter being popularly known as David's, may very well be justified, and while we may, therefore, believe that more or less of David's own compositions have been preserved amongst the Psalms, the titles which have been added to them cannot be regarded as determining which are really his. As Dr Nairne has suggestively pointed out, the Jewish Church began that " mystical " interpretation of the Psalms which Christians have found so helpful. Just as Christians find in the Psalter much that is richly illustrative of the life and work of our Lord, so the Jewish Church found in it much that was richly illustrative of the life and work of David—not merely the historical king but the ideal king, the representative and symbol of the national monarchy, round whom so many of their hopes and aspirations gathered.[1]

There are five Psalms bearing names which cannot refer to collections. One is " of Moses " (Psalm xc.) ;

[1] *Faith of the Old Testament*, p. 182. Cf. also Wedgwood : *The Message of Israel*, pp. 43, 44.

two are "of Solomon" (Psalms lxxii. and cxxvii.); one each (Psalms lxxxviii. and lxxxix) "of Heman" and "of Ethan"—wise men whose names are referred to in the Book of Kings, or founders of Temple guilds of musicians like Asaph and Korah.[1] There is little in any of these Psalms to determine whether the tradition the title embodies is correct, or whether the meaning is that the Psalms are written from the standpoint of those whose names are given. In the first-named the latter is probably the true explanation and analogy suggests it in the other instances.

We may remind ourselves that questions as to the authorship of the Psalms and the circumstances in which they were written, though of much interest and some importance, do not in any way affect their spiritual value or their use in the worship either of the Jewish or the Christian Church. Canon Julian said that no other English hymn could be named which has laid so broad and firm a grasp upon the English-speaking world as "Rock of Ages." Would the value of that hymn be less, or its hold upon the English-speaking world be weakened, if we had never learned that Toplady wrote it under the title of "A living and dying Prayer for the Holiest Believer in the World," and published it as part of a fierce controversial article against Arminian teaching? And, while those who have read Newman's *Apologia* must have been deeply interested in his description of the circumstances under which he

[1] 1 Kings iv. 31; 1 Chron. ii. 6; vi. 44; xv. 17, 19; xxv. 5. Different individuals of the same name seem to be referred to in these passages, but there may be some confusion in the descriptions.

wrote " Lead, kindly Light," are they in any better position to appreciate the beauty of the hymn or to use it for the expression of their own spiritual aspiration than others who are ignorant of the history of Newman's religious experience and opinions ? The truth is that even when hymns have had their origin in some vivid emotion or crucial experience of their authors, they soon lose all that is merely historical and individual when they are adopted by the Church. Other associations gather round them which are often more significant and memorable than those of their origin. They become the vehicle of the devotion of a succession of men and women whose souls thirst after God, who cry to Him for help in their trouble, who praise Him for His goodness and mercy and who yearn for the triumph of His kingdom.

So it was with the Psalms. Some of them were born of purely individual experiences of sorrow or of joy. Others were the expression, in a personal form, of the religious emotion aroused in the community by some trial or persecution through which it had to pass, or by some great and merciful deliverance that had been wrought for it. Still others arose out of experiences of united worship and were composed with the direct purpose of providing forms of prayer and praise for the services of the Temple. But all alike passed into the possession of the Jewish Church, and that Church filled them with the meaning of its growing and developing faith. There may be elements of great antiquity in the Book of Psalms but the collection was not completed until the second century B.C., and the faith

which it represents as a whole is the faith of that period. Curious searchers may discover here and there indications of obsolete forms of belief, remnants of ancient mythologies and traditions, but the impression which the whole collection gives is of a faith which has been enriched from many sources, a religious experience which has been enlarged and deepened by many vicissitudes of individual and national fortune. It is not merely the faith and experience which might have been possessed by a man like David, who lived a thousand years before Christ was born, but the faith and experience of those who have inherited the great revelation which came to Israel through Hosea, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and their fellow-prophets; the faith of those who have known what it is to be torn from the land which was not merely the home of their fathers but the home of their religion and their God; the faith of those who under the discipline of exile have sought and found new forms of fellowship and fresh modes of worship; the faith of those who have learned, even from priest and scribe, more profound conceptions of sin and holiness; the faith of those who, through many disappointed hopes and unfulfilled expectations, have been brought to a wider and more spiritual view of the Divine purpose. In other words, it is the faith into which Christ was born (for the few generations which intervened added little to it) and of which He was the Crown and Consummation. When once this is realised the discovery that the Book of Psalms is the result of a long process of growth and development will be recognised as giving it a more precious and

abiding significance than could be possessed by any collection of the poems of a single national hero, or even an anthology of the work of various poets expressing purely individual emotions arising from local and temporal conditions.

Note.—Two terms which occur in the titles of the Psalms have not been mentioned in either of these introductory chapters, as their meaning is obscure. *Maschil* is found in the title of thirteen Psalms. It probably means "a skilful Psalm," and is so translated in the R.V. margin of Psalm xlvii. 7. But whether the term "skilful" applies to the words or the music is unknown. *Michtam* occurs in the title of six Psalms. The A.V. margin renders it "a golden Psalm," but the translation is doubtful. The word occurs again in Isaiah xxxviii. 9, and is simply rendered "writing" in A.V. and R.V. Moffatt translates it "piece." Dr Briggs thinks that both these words and the word "Psalm" were titles of minor collections afterwards gathered into larger books and ultimately into our present Psalter.

Chapter III

THE POETRY OF THE PSALMS

"A nation's poets are its true owners; and by the stroke of the pen they convey the title-deeds of its real possessions to strangers and aliens."—G. E. Woodberry.

CHAPTER III

THE POETRY OF THE PSALMS

When we speak of the poetry of the Psalms we do not refer merely to their literary form but to their essential substance. It is their poetry which makes them what they are and gives them their meaning and value. Poetry is not a device which may be employed at will in the narration of facts or the expression of ideas in words. It may be used in the narration of facts, but if so, it is because the poet's object is not simply to narrate facts, as such, but to express some inward significance they hold for his own spirit. It may be employed in the expression of ideas, but such ideas will not be the merely logical outcome of processes of reasoning; they will have been grasped by a certain quality of insight or intuition and held in immediate consciousness. In other words what poetry expresses is not facts or ideas, but spiritual experience of some kind.[1] But, before such experience can be expressed as poetry the imagination must have been at work upon it. It must be seen in a context of relations and likenesses and analogies by which it is illuminated and interpreted. Symbols and metaphors deriving their significance from other associations and previous

[1] Need the reader be reminded that *spiritual* experience does not necessarily mean *religious* experience?

experiences must be pressed into the service of the new experience that its various aspects may be suggested in words, and the meaning and value of the whole conveyed to others capable of responding to such suggestion. Over and above all this the emotion which accompanied the experience, or which is aroused as the imagination dwells upon it, needs to be communicated and, as by some fundamental law of human nature emotion tends to rhythmical expression, the language which the imagination creates for the expression of spiritual experience is moulded by rhythm.[1]

It is because of this that poetry is the oldest form of literature. Before men felt any desire to narrate facts or record events, before they had any abstract thoughts they wished to communicate, they had experiences which they wanted to express. The warrior singing his deeds of prowess in battle was not seeking to convey information ; he was attempting to express the fury he had felt against his enemies, the wild joy of the conflict and the delight of triumph ; and, while he expressed it, to reproduce something of that experience in his hearers. The minstrel who sang of lovers of past days was not seeking to preserve the stories of such from oblivion ; he was thinking of the experience of love which the stories suggested and the interest of his song lay in the universal appeal such experience makes. So it is also with religion. Its most primitive form of literature is not theological but poetical. What

[1] In the foregoing statement of the nature of poetry, and his later references to this view, the writer is conscious of indebtedness to Lascelles Abercrombie's *The Theory of Poetry*.

men first desired to convey was not their thoughts about God but their experience of Him—their consciousness of His reality and His presence, the feelings of hope or fear, of grief or joy, of doubt or faith which His dealings with them inspired—and for this the imaginative power of the poet was needed.

In the Psalms we find that imaginative power at work, often, though not always, in the very highest degree, and we can see how much it does for us. Let us take the familiar 23rd Psalm as an illustration of what we have been trying to explain. If the writer simply wanted to state certain facts or ideas about God he might have said something of this kind: "Through the various circumstances of my life God has guided, helped and blessed me and I believe that He will take care of me right to the end." Or a modern theologian might make a similar confession in the frigid formula: "I believe in Divine Providence." Now it is conceivable that a spiritual experience might lie behind either of those statements similar to that out of which the 23rd Psalm was born, but in those statements it is certain that such an experience has not been expressed so as to convey its meaning and value to anyone else. Consider then what went to the making of the Psalm. The author has real experiences of God's goodness and guidance, and he meditates on these until they all fuse themselves together into a vivid consciousness of a gracious relationship with God as the dominating and abiding fact of his existence. High and holy emotions are aroused in his soul and he feels the impulse to express his experience, that by expression he may continue his delight in it and make it known

to others. He lets his imagination work upon his experience and soon imagery comes crowding into his mind which shapes itself to his purpose. He thinks of a shepherd's work and remembers the care with which he guides and guards his helpless flock, and that gives him a suggestive picture of the Divine relationship to himself of which he is so conscious. Then details in the picture begin to come out: the varied scenes through which the shepherd leads his flock in search of pasture and the changing circumstances of his own life become inextricably woven together. But he is conscious of something in his present experience which gives him hope and confidence for the future. As he thinks of it the shepherd becomes the guide, but he still has the shepherd's staff and club, so no matter how dark the valley through which he leads, there will be adequate support and defence. Then another figure takes hold of his imagination. It is that of some powerful personage who delights to entertain his guest, preparing a banquet for him and paying him festal honours under the very eyes of his enemies.[1] That also is something of what his experience means and it suggests a further aspect of it, a sense of abiding security and welfare, as of one who remains a guest in the house of his powerful protector. So the spiritual experience of the Psalmist, an experience too rich and complex ever to be summed up in a formula, or expressed in such words and phrases as we use to convey material facts or scientific explanations of them, is seized in its essential signifi-

[1] Perhaps, as Sir G. A. Smith has suggested, the thought is of a fugitive from the avenger of blood who finds asylum in a friendly tent.

cance by his poetic imagination and given that unique expression which has brought to countless others the comfort and joy of sharing it. This is the real worth of the Psalm. It is independent of any consideration as to its authorship or as to whether the Psalmist was thinking of his own individual experience or that of the nation to which he belonged, or blending both together in his imagination. But it is not independent of its poetry, for it is by its poetry that it lives and can move the minds and hearts of those who read it.

This imaginative power of poetry in the Psalms, unlike its literary form, which we have yet to consider, is not lost or weakened by translation into a different language and we can feel it to the full in our English version. We shall see in later chapters how the poetry of the Psalms helps us to apprehend truths about God and His ways and purposes in nature and in life and history. Here we may content ourselves with quoting the words of Matthew Arnold: "The spirit and tongue of Israel kept a propriety, a reserve, a sense of the inadequacy of language in conveying man's ideas of God, which contrast strongly with the licence of affirmation in our Western theology. 'The high and holy One, that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy,'[1] is far more proper and felicitous language than 'the moral and intelligent Governor of the universe,' just because it far less attempts to be precise, but keeps to the language of poetry and does not essay the language of science. As he had developed his idea of God from personal experience, Israel knew

[1] Isa. lvii. 15.

what we, who have developed our idea from his words about it, so often are ignorant of: that his words were but *thrown out* at a vast object of consciousness, which he could not fully grasp."[1] Of course we do not deny that there is a highly developed theology to be found in the Psalms; we only assert that it is not presented in any abstract and metaphysical form. It is theology embodied in spiritual experience and clothed in concrete living forms which, coming from the imagination of the poet, make their appeal primarily not to the reasoning faculty of man but to his imaginative sympathy.

But poetry is popularly considered to be a form of language which can be distinguished from prose by a certain arrangement of syllables and words forming a regular and repeating pattern. This is a misleading description, but there is an element of truth in it which we have already hinted at and must now deal with a little more fully. Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Apologie for Poetrie* says: "It is not rhyming and versing that maketh a poet no more than a long gown maketh an advocate, who, though he pleaded in armour should be an advocate and no soldier; but it is that feigning notable images of virtues, vices, or what else, with that delightful teaching, which must be the right describing note to know a poet by. Although, indeed, the senate of poets have chosen verse as their fittest raiment." Yet such raiment is not arbitrarily forced upon the poetic conception, or added to it as a merely external ornament; it is a part of the means by which the poet accomplishes his purpose and, as we have already

[1] *Literature and Dogma*, ch. i., sec. 3.

suggested, the reason for this is to be found in the tendency of emotion to find rhythmical expression. This is seen in its most primitive form in the movement of dancing, and it is more fully developed in poetry and music.

It is possible, however, to have language which is the expression of some experience of the spirit imaginatively interpreted and which conveys something of the emotional quality of that experience in a rhythmical arrangement of words, without its taking the recognised form of poetry. Take, for example, this sentence from Pater's famous description of Leonardo da Vinci's portrait of Monna Lisa: "She is older than the rocks among which she sits; like the vampire, she has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave; and has been a diver in deep seas, and keeps their fallen day about her; and trafficked for strange webs with Eastern merchants: and, as Leda, was the mother of Helen of Troy, and, as St Anne, the mother of Mary; and all this has been to her but as the sound of lyres and flutes, and lives only in the delicacy with which it has moulded the changing lineaments, and tinged the eyelids and the hands." That is not really a description of the picture, but of what the picture came to mean to Pater as he contemplated it through the eye of his imagination, and the rhythm of his language does much to suggest the emotion which accompanied his experience. Here are all the elements of poetry, but one final process for the making of a poem is omitted. The rhythm of the words and syllables is not organised into that definite and repeating pattern which

we call metre, and, therefore, we classify it as " prose," though it is highly " poetical " in quality.

Now this distinction, which we have been seeking to make clear, is of great importance for a true appreciation of the poetry of the Psalms. Hebrew poetry had its patterns, of which one of the chief characteristics is a division into lines, each with a regular number of stressed or accented syllables. Naturally this cannot be completely retained and adequately represented in a translation into another language. Our English version often reproduces it for a line or two at a time and sometimes for longer passages. Here is an example from the 19th Psalm :

> The láw of the Lórd is pérfect,
> Restóring the sóul :
> The téstimony of the Lórd is súre,
> Making wíse the símple.
> The précepts of the Lórd are ríght,
> Rejoícing the heárt :
> The commándment of the Lórd is púre,
> Enlíghtening the éyes.
> The féar of the Lórd is cléan,
> Endúring for éver :
> The júdgments of the Lórd are trúe,
> And ríghteous altogéther.

Dr McFadyen has succeeded in reproducing these rhythms to a remarkable extent in his modern version of the Psalms.[1] But the full effect of this rhythmical structure can only be appreciated by those who are familiar with Hebrew, and even Hebrew scholars find it very difficult to formulate any metrical theory which will completely fit the text of the poetical portions of the Old Testament as

[1] *The Psalms in Modern Speech and Rhythmical Form.*

we have it to-day. Nevertheless our Authorised Version (and to a less extent the Revised Version), even where it does not reproduce the rhythm of the original, often has a rhythm of its own which suggests the emotional quality of the experience the poetry expresses in a similar way to the sentence from Pater quoted above. Take, for example, this passage from the 139th Psalm and, without setting it out in lines or marking accents, its stately rhythm must be apparent to the reader and must help him to feel the noble emotion which the imaginative realisation of the omnipresence of God inspires :

> "Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven thou art there: if I make my bed in Sheol, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."

There is, however, another characteristic of Hebrew poetry, present in the Psalms, which can be reproduced in any translation and which helps to preserve the effect of poetry. It is a rhythm not of sound but of sense. It has been called "parallelism," and in its simplest form it consists of two lines, the second of which repeats in other words the thought of the first :

> The heavens declare the glory of God;
> And the firmament sheweth his handywork.
>
> Day unto day uttereth speech,
> And night unto night sheweth knowledge.[1]

[1] Ps. xix. 1, 2.

Sometimes the second line adds a detail to the first and carries the thought a little further :

> The LORD answer thee in the day of trouble ;
> The name of the God of Jacob set thee up on high.[1]

Sometimes the second line is used to express a contrast to the statement of the first :

> For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous :
> But the way of the wicked shall perish.[2]

Sometimes the parallelism is continued for three or four lines, and there are further ways in which the lines may be related to each other which need not be set out in detail for our present purpose. A full analysis of all these varieties of parallelism may be found in the introduction to most modern commentaries on the Psalms, but their elaborate subdivision and classification is not necessary in order to recognise the significance of the arrangement.

Parallelism is not peculiar to Hebrew poetry ; it is quite common in the poetry of many primitive literatures and is occasionally found in later verse moulded by a more developed art. Folk-songs, nursery rhymes and ballads have it :

> " Old King Cole was a merry old soul
> And a merry old soul was he."
>
> " Then up and crew the red, red cock,
> And up and crew the gray."
>
> " The youngster was clothed in scarlet red
> In scarlet fine and gay."

[1] Ps. xx. 1. [2] Ps. i. 6.

When Longfellow wanted to represent the simplicity of the Indian Edda in his "Hiawatha" he made very appropriate use of parallelism :

> "There he sang of Hiawatha,
> Sang the song of Hiawatha,
> Sang his wondrous birth and being,
> How he prayed and how he fasted,
> How he lived, and toiled, and suffered,
> That the tribes of men might prosper,
> That he might advance his people."

A good many instances might be quoted from modern poetry showing that the use of parallelism has not been entirely abandoned even when there is no thought of reproducing the simplicity of older forms of literature. Let one quotation from Tennyson's *Lotos-Eaters* suffice :

> "Why are we weigh'd upon with heaviness,
> And utterly consumed with sharp distress,
> While all things else have rest from weariness ?
> All things have rest : why should we toil alone,
> We only toil, who are the first of things,
> And make perpetual moan,
> Still from one sorrow to another thrown."

But in all these instances the use of parallelism is only occasional ; even in the primitive literatures referred to it can only be called a common feature of the poetry, not a predominant characteristic of it. In Hebrew poetry, however, it is a predominant characteristic ; this rhythm of sense shares with the rhythm of sound in the final process which even language which expresses imaginatively some experience of the spirit must go through to shape it into

a poem. This may be verified by a simple experiment which has been suggested by the late Professor Moulton.[1] Take the 105th Psalm for an example and read a few verses, commencing with the eighth, omitting the second line of each.

> "He hath remembered his covenant for ever, the covenant which he made with Abraham, and confirmed the same unto Jacob for a statute, saying, 'Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan,' when they were but a few men in number; and they went about from nation to nation. He suffered no man to do them wrong, saying, 'Touch not my anointed ones.'"

That is a straightforward piece of narrative prose. But now put in the alternate lines which have been omitted, and see how both the form and the spirit of the passage is changed.

"He hath remembered his covenant for ever,
The word which he commanded to a thousand generations;
The covenant which he made with Abraham,
And his oath unto Isaac;
And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a statute,
To Israel for an everlasting covenant:
Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan,
The lot of your inheritance:
When they were but a few men in number;
Yea, very few, and sojourners in it;
And they went about from nation to nation,
From one kingdom to another people.
He suffered no man to do them wrong;
Yea, he reproved kings for their sakes;
Saying, Touch not my anointed ones,
And do my prophets no harm."

[1] *Literary Study of the Bible*, p. 47.

This is still narrative; one would not choose it as an example of the expression of spiritual experience interpreted through the imagination, though taking the Psalm as a whole it is that. But the narrative is no longer prose; we recognise in it something which gives the effect of poetry. There is rhythm, but, so far as sounds go, no change has been introduced by the second line of each couplet. It is the rhythm of sense of which we are conscious and that gives us something of the spirit of the poetry even when we are ignorant of the rhythm of sound which the original language possesses. Because of this the parallelism should never be lost sight of when reading the Psalms. One reason for the failure of all attempts adequately to translate them into verse is that the parallelism is often obscured or destroyed in the process. Besides this, a recognition of this characteristic often helps, in various ways, to make the meaning of the words clearer.

A third feature of poetry which may occasionally be found in the Psalms is the building up of the lines into stanzas or strophes, but this is an obscure subject which can hardly be considered without reference to the Hebrew text, and on which Hebrew scholars hold very divergent opinions. There are, however, a few instances in which the division of Psalms into stanzas or strophes is evident in any translation. Such a division seems to be indicated by the occurrence of refrains. Take, for instance, the Psalm which has got divided into two and is numbered as xlii. and xliii. in our version, and note the refrain repeated at the close of each of its three stanzas.

Why art thou cast down, O my soul ?
And why art thou disquieted within me ?
Hope thou in God : for I shall yet praise him,
Who is the health of my countenance and my God.

Perhaps the alphabetic Psalms may be included under this head. The chief of these is the 119th Psalm in which the verses of each section all begin with the same letter and the sections follow one another in the order of the Hebrew alphabet. Here the arrangement is noted in our version by printing the Hebrew letter at the head of each section, but in other instances it is not evident without reference to the Hebrew. One such Psalm, the 111th, has been arranged alphabetically in English by the late Professor Binnie, and a few lines will show the form of it.

" *A*dore will I the LORD with all my heart,
*B*oth in the meeting of the upright and in the congregation.
*C*onfessedly great are the deeds of the LORD ;
*D*elighters in them that search them out.
*E*xcellent for honour and majesty is his work :
*F*or evermore doth his righteousness endure." [1]

It cannot be claimed that this contributes much to the real business of poetry and we do not lose anything of the value of such Psalms by ignoring the arrangement.[2]

Rhyme, which is so common a feature of the poetry of many languages, was not a characteristic of Hebrew poetry in Old Testament times. There are instances in which it occurs, but they are occa-

[1] *The Psalms, their History, Teachings and Use,* p. 142.
[2] The other alphabetic Psalms are ix., x., xxv., xxxiv., xxxvii., cxii., cxlv.

sional and accidental only. Some amount of alliteration is found, and also of assonance (the correspondence of vowel sounds), but they are not regular features of the poetry, and the English reader of the Psalms is not at any real disadvantage in being unable to recognise them. Frequently there is a designed recurrence of similar sounds, not merely at the beginning or end of words but also in the middle, and this, of course, is missed in translation.

In conclusion, it needs to be remembered that while some recognition of the main characteristics of its form is desirable, poetry does not consist in the observance of rules and formulas. It is a movement of life and there is room for infinite variety. Poets may school themselves to the masters who have preceded them but they are not mere imitators. They are not craftsmen working to plans and patterns but artists seeking to express the experience of their spirits and moulding their material to that supreme end. All this applies to our study of the Psalms. They should be approached as poetry. It is not that they all attain the same level of poetic power; but though there are individual Psalms that fall short in this respect, the collection as a whole is poetry of the very highest order. That is why it makes such a universal appeal to the hearts of men; it speaks through the imagination and expresses spiritual experience which cannot be apprehended simply by the activity of the reason. And the kind of spiritual experience with which it deals is that for which men most widely hunger, the experience of God. For this reason humble and devout souls, who know nothing about the

distinctive characteristics of poetry or the way it accomplishes its purposes, often receive the best it has to give. They grasp the significance of the Psalmist's experience, they respond to the emotion with which he expresses it, and they enter into the enjoyment of a similar experience in their own lives. And while we study the poetic forms we find in the Psalms, and trace the origins of ideas and symbols and metaphors, we must see to it that this study does not cramp or limit our imagination but quickens and strengthens it, so that the poetry accomplishes its high purpose and leads us into such rich experiences of penitence and trust, of hope and of joy, of thankfulness and peace, as those out of which the Psalms were born.

Chapter IV

THE RELIGION OF THE PSALMS: PERSONAL AND CORPORATE

"Souls who live an heroic spiritual life within great religious traditions and institutions, attain to a rare volume and vividness of religious insight, conviction and reality. They can, at their best, train other souls, who are not all unworthy of such training, to a depth and tenderness of full and joyous union with God, the Eternal, which utterly surpasses, not only in quantity but in quality, what we can and do find amongst souls outside all such institutions, or not directly taught by souls trained within such traditions."—F. von Hügel.

CHAPTER IV

THE RELIGION OF THE PSALMS: PERSONAL AND CORPORATE

Approaching the Book of Psalms as "The Hymn-book of the Jewish Church" we have already seen that the collection as a whole expresses the faith, not of isolated individuals, but of a religious community, and this characteristic has been intensified by the use of the Psalms through generations of common worship. Nevertheless there is an individual element in the Psalms which must never be forgotten. They are the expression in poetry of spiritual experience, and that must always be personal. Even when external events are described, poetry gives them to us as they have been seen by the poet's eye and felt in the poet's heart. And if the poet speaks for a community, it is because he is identified with it. He is one who knows what it means to have the

> "Desperate tides of the whole great world's anguish
> Forced through the channels of a single heart."

Whether they be experiences of sorrow and persecution, or of deliverance and joy, it is only as they become his own experiences and are interpreted by the power of his own imagination that they get themselves expressed in poetry.

Now if this is realised, the question as to whether the singular pronoun in the Psalms refers simply to the individual, or represents the community, will not, in many cases, have much importance. It has been claimed by a recent school of critics that the "I" of the Psalmists never refers to the individual but always to the Jewish Church, but this extreme position is being abandoned generally to-day. It must be recognised that the nation is often personified in the Old Testament and there are Psalms in which this is obviously done :

> Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up,
> Let Israel now say ;
> Many a time have they afflicted me from my youth up :
> Yet they have not prevailed against me.
> The plowers plowed my back,
> They made long their furrows.[1]

It need not be denied that there are other instances of personification not quite so obvious as this, but in many cases to suppose such personification is altogether unnatural,[2] and sometimes the Psalmist clearly distinguishes himself from the community.

Nevertheless, even when the experience of the Psalmist is most intensely personal, it must be remembered that he is a member of a religious community and it is in that community that he has discovered the personal relationship to God out of which his penitence and faith have been born and

[1] Ps. cxxix. 1-3.

[2] "When a Psalmist says he lies sick on his bed, he means what he says, and is not speaking in the name of his nation of their evil condition in the midst of the neighbouring peoples. This does not hinder the community from adopting his language later on, and adapting it to their needs." Cobb : *Psalms*, p. xiii.

his cry for help or his song of praise have come. Throughout their history the people of Israel were conscious of a special relationship to God, and this consciousness is abundantly revealed in the Psalms. The definite expression of this relationship was associated with certain historic events or transactions in which God was said to have made a *covenant* with His people. There was a covenant with Abraham assuring to his descendants the possession of the land of Canaan; another with David constituting his house the rulers of the Kingdom; another with Levi giving that family the priesthood; and, above all, there was the covenant made with the whole people at the giving of the Law on Sinai. There are a few Psalms in which one of these covenants is specially referred to. Psalm cv. celebrates the faithfulness of God to His covenant with Abraham:

> He hath remembered his covenant for ever,
> The word which he commanded to a thousand generations;
> The covenant which he made with Abraham,
> And his oath unto Isaac;
> And confirmed the same unto Jacob for a statute,
> To Israel for an everlasting covenant:
> Saying, Unto thee will I give the land of Canaan,
> The lot of your inheritance.[1]

Psalm lxxxix. describes the covenant that was made with David and appeals to it for deliverance from the disasters which have fallen upon the nation in the overthrow of the Kingdom and the exile of the people. But usually the covenant idea is referred to without specific reference to any of its historic

[1] Ps. cv. 8-11.

manifestations. The Sinaitic Covenant, however, dominates the conception, for in that form the obligations which rest upon the people are shown as well as the privileges accorded to them.

> All the paths of the LORD are loving-kindness and truth
> Unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.[1]

> All this has come upon us: yet have we not forgotten thee,
> Neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant.[2]

> They kept not the covenant of God,
> And refused to walk in his law.[3]

The last quotation brings into view another fact of supreme importance to the Religion of the Psalmists. Out of that special relationship of Israel with God, established and expressed by the Covenant, came the Law. In its origin it was the statement of the human obligations which arose from the experience of divine redemption. That is evident from the opening words of the Decalogue: "I am the LORD thy God, which brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have none other gods before me."[4] Israel never conceived the Law simply as a code of precepts and prohibitions imposed by arbitrary authority. It was one expression of a gracious relationship: the commands of God were based upon His gifts and promises. So it was perfectly natural to give the name of the Law to a collection of writings which embodied not only legal enactments but also the story of God's gracious dealings with His people. By the time the Book of Psalms was completed this

[1] Ps. xxv. 10.
[2] Ps. xliv. 17.
[3] Ps. lxxviii. 10 (cf. 37).
[4] Ex. xx. 2, 3.

collection had taken the form of the first five books of the Old Testament, which we now call the Pentateuch, and devotion to these sacred writings was a fundamental characteristic of the piety of the true Israelite.

It is significant that the Psalm selected to be an introduction to the collection describes the godly man as one who is devoted to the Law :

> His delight is in the law of the LORD ;
> And in his law doth he meditate day and night.[1]

A fuller expression of such devotion is given in the second part of the 19th Psalm and in the 119th the theme is elaborated with loving ingenuity into a long acrostic poem. This Psalm rings the changes on a number of synonyms for Law—*testimonies*, *precepts*, *statutes*, *judgments*, *commandments* and *word* — which suggest various aspects under which it could be regarded and the rich stimulus it was to the religious life of those who sought and found God in it. No doubt this completely developed conception of the Law was not possessed by all the Psalmists, but the germ of it was present throughout the religious history of the people to whom they belonged, and those who collected the Psalms and used them in common worship would regard them as expressions of the religion taught by the Law, just as devout worshippers to-day read their hymn-book in the light of the teaching of the Bible.

Much of the Law, especially in its latest portions, is concerned with the ritual of sacrifice, but of this comparatively little is said in the Psalms. Sacrifices

[1] Ps. i. 2.

"of righteousness,"[1] "of joy"[2] and "of thanksgiving"[3] are referred to, and the Hebrew idiom does not permit us to understand that righteousness, joy and thanksgiving are to take the place of material offerings. The meaning of these phrases would be better expressed in English by "righteous sacrifices" or "the right sacrifices," "joyous sacrifices" and "the thanksgiving sacrifice" or "the sacrifice of thank-offering." There are, however, other passages in the Psalms which appear to deprecate the offering of sacrifice. One of the best known is in the 40th Psalm, the meaning of which is brought out a little more clearly in Moffatt's translation :

> "Thou carest not for sacrifice and offering,
> For no burnt-offering or sin-offering is thy demand.
> An open ear thou gavest me ;
> I answered, 'Here I come
> To do thy bidding in the Book ;
> To please and serve thee is my joy,
> Thy law lies deep within my heart.'"

The "Book" referred to here seems to be that which we know as Deuteronomy, the second of the three great legal codes which were included in the fivefold Book of the Law. The sin-offering, however, is not referred to in the Deuteronomic code ; it only comes into view in the later Priestly code which we have in the Book of Leviticus. There is some reason for translating the Hebrew text "burnt-offering with sin,"[4] instead of "burnt-offering and sin-offering," as it is in the A.V. and R.V. This

[1] Ps. iv. 5. [2] Ps. xxvii. 6.
[3] Ps. cvii. 22 ; cxvi. 17.
[4] See Briggs : *Psalms* (I.C.C.), vol. 1, p. 354.

brings the words into line with such a passage as "I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting,"[1] and whether the change of translation is made or not, the meaning of the Psalmist can be illustrated by the paragraph of Isaiah from which that sentence is quoted. Another passage of the same tenor is found in the 51st Psalm:

> For thou delightest not in sacrifice; else would I give it:
> Thou hast no pleasure in burnt offering.
> The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
> A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise.[2]

Such utterances as these breathe the very spirit of the Prophets, who always insisted on the supremacy of the moral requirements of God over the ritual and ceremonial ordinances through which He is worshipped. Samuel, a priest as well as a prophet, enunciated this vital principle of spiritual religion: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams."[3] Hosea asserted it, speaking in the name of God: "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings."[4] Jeremiah reiterated the truth and maintained that it had always been assumed in the covenant between God and His people.[5]

There is no reason, however, to suppose that either Prophet or Psalmist rejected sacrificial rites because they dwelt upon the importance of spiritual worship. On the occasion of the use of a fresh and

[1] Isa. i. 13. [2] Ps. li. 16, 17. [3] 1 Sam. xv. 22.
[4] Hosea vi. 6. [5] Jer. vii. 21-23.

larger room for a prayer-meeting, Cowper wrote the well-known hymn :

> " Jesus, where'er Thy people meet,
> There they behold Thy mercy seat ;
> Where'er they seek Thee Thou art found,
> And every place is hallowed ground."

But neither he nor his friend John Newton, the Vicar of Olney, for whose prayer-meeting he wrote the hymn, had any thought of deprecating worship in a Church, and we see no incongruity in putting that hymn in the same collection as

> " We love the place, O God,
> Wherein Thine honour dwells,"

or even in singing both hymns during the same service. In a similar way such profound utterances of faith and penitence, independent of form and ritual, as the Psalms we have referred to, are included in a collection intended to be used in sacrificial worship. At the end of the 51st Psalm there appears to be a liturgical addition which was perhaps made by some priest who was fearful of the effect the bold doctrine of the previous verses might have on the established order of things. But we have no need to seek a formal harmony of all the expressions of religious experience and devout aspiration which the Psalms contain. We know there is room for both the mystic and the institutional elements of religion not merely in the same community but in the same individual life. While the spirit of man has to express itself through a material organism the two elements cannot be divorced. Yet it is the

spirit that is the life; the form, the symbol, the ritual act is nothing apart from it.

But if there is comparatively little in the Psalms about the laws of sacrifice, there is very much about the Temple and its worship which centred in sacrifice. In the early days of Jewish religion God was regarded as present everywhere. At any moment He might manifest Himself; any place might become the scene of His gracious revelation. And wherever He revealed Himself it was fitting that an altar should be erected and sacrifices offered. Nothing elaborate was needed: an altar of earth or, at best, of unhewn stone, sufficed.[1] So a number of sanctuaries or shrines sprang up in various parts of the land, and one had never far to go for the sacred ordinances of religion. But abuses and corruptions crept in. Worship at local sanctuaries was contaminated by heathen influences and customs. Then a great reform was initiated, under the influence of the Book of Deuteronomy, and all worship was centred in the Temple at Jerusalem. This is the state of things which we find throughout the Book of Psalms. The Psalmists do not forget that God is present everywhere. They speak of Him as riding on the clouds and coming in the storm; they describe Him as looking from heaven and beholding the sons of men; they believe that there is no place where they can escape from His Spirit or flee from His presence. But in a special and peculiar sense He is present in the Temple:

> In Judah is God known:
> His name is great in Israel.
> In Salem also is his tabernacle,
> And his dwelling-place in Zion.[2]

[1] Ex. xx. 24, 25. [2] Ps. lxxvi. 1, 2.

It is because of this that the heart of the devout Israelite always turns to Jerusalem. It is "the dwelling-place of God's name,"[1] the place of His self-revelation to men, the centre from which His power and grace are radiated. Many are the utterances of passionate love and longing for the Temple in the Psalms:

One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after;
That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life,
To behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple.[2]

From one great Psalm,[3] we see how the bitterness of an exile's lot was to be cut off from such privileges. He thinks of his past experiences:

How I went with the throng, and led them to the house of God,
With the voice of joy and praise, a multitude keeping holyday.

He had found God in such joyous worship in the Temple but now, far from the sacred place, he seems far from the Divine presence and he cries out:

When shall I come and appear before God?

With similar memories, but with joyful anticipation of an immediate renewal of former mercies, the pilgrim going up to a feast at the Temple sang:

How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts!
My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD,
My heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.[4]

[1] Ps. lxxiv. 7. [2] Ps. xxvii. 4.
[3] It has been divided into two Psalms xlii. and xliii.
[4] Ps. lxxxiv. 1, 2.

For him one of these great days in the Temple is better than a thousand spent elsewhere. The deep joy and satisfaction of such a pilgrim is again expressed in the familiar words :

> I was glad when they said unto me,
> Let us go unto the house of the LORD.[1]

But we need not make further quotations to illustrate the place of the Temple and its worship in the affections of the Psalmists. Throughout the collection we hear the echo of the cry :

> LORD, I love the habitation of thy house,
> And the place where thy glory dwelleth.[2]

Such a brief review of the religion of the Psalms shows that it is at once personal and corporate. The two elements cannot be separated ; neither would be what it is without the other. It is not open to us to regard the Psalms as a collection of poems of purely individual religion which have been appropriated and adapted to the uses of common worship. Nor can we conceive them as expressions of a national consciousness which were afterwards found to be adaptable to the purposes of private religion. The personal and the corporate grew and flourished together. The devout Israelite did not separate himself in thought from the community in which he had found God and through the institutions of which he worshipped Him. He felt no need to distinguish carefully between his own private joys and sorrows and those which belonged to him as a member of the community. Personal and social

[1] Ps. cxxii. 1. [2] Ps. xxvi. 8.

sin were felt as one by the sensitive conscience. Isaiah's confession illustrates that truth: "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." [1] In the same way personal and social need may be merged in the profound experience out of which such prayers are born as we have in Psalms xxii., lxix. or cii. When we read Blake's inspiring verse:

> "I will not cease from mental fight,
> Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant land,"

we do not let the diversity of the pronouns disturb the inspiration which the verse brings us by questioning whether the poet is expressing the ideal of an individual or a community. And in reading the Psalms it is very seldom that we can gain anything from a consideration of that question. In its profoundest and sincerest expressions the religious experience of the spiritual Israel and the spiritually-minded Israelite is one and the same.

[1] Isa. vi. 5.

Chapter V

THE GLORY AND GRACE OF GOD

"The chief thing for individuals, as for nations, is not to believe that God reigneth so much as to know what kind of a God He is who reigneth."—GEORGE ADAM SMITH.

CHAPTER V

THE GLORY AND GRACE OF GOD

It has often been remarked that the theology of any people is influenced far more by the hymns they sing than by the direct instruction they receive. The stirring hymns of Luther did more to spread the principles of the Reformation throughout the Germany of his day than all his polemical writings. The hymns which Charles Wesley wrote were more effective in spreading and preserving the doctrines which were the inspiration of the Evangelical Revival than the sermons of his brother John. And, to take a more recent illustration, competent observers have pointed out that, in the Anglican Revival of the last sixty years, great influence has been exerted by the successive editions of *Hymns Ancient and Modern.* This influence of hymns upon popular theology is not always for good. In *The Army and Religion*, that profoundly disquieting report on the religion of "the man in the street," we are told that the idea many men have of Christ is derived not from the Gospels but from "hymns of a weak and washy type," and there can be little doubt that the crude sentimentalism of many of the popular evangelistic hymns of the past generation has had a baneful effect on current

ideas of religion. Bishop Wordsworth, speaking of hymns from this point of view, said: "A Church which forgoes the use of hymns in her office of teaching, neglects one of the most efficacious instruments for correcting error, and for disseminating truth, as well as for ministering comfort and edification." [1]

But theology is found in hymns, not in formal definition and precise statements, but as it has been vitalised in personal experience and clothed in the forms created by the poetic imagination. It is in this sense that we may look for it in the Psalms. The late Dr Denney once heard a well-known man, speaking of difficulties in the Bible, express himself in this fashion: "The Gospels are a story, and a story may conceivably be untrue; the Epistles are arguments, and arguments may conceivably be unsound; but the Psalms are the immediate reflection of personal experiences, and we can take them as they stand without asking any questions." [2] There is much truth in this, and though the experiences of different men, living at various times and under diverse circumstances, necessarily find varying modes of expression, there is a deep underlying unity which has been recognised by those who have collected the Psalms and by those who have put them to a common use in prayer and praise and meditation. Our present inquiry will, therefore, be not as to the views of individual Psalmists, nor as to such development of doctrine as might be traced if the Psalms could be carefully assigned to different periods, but as to the

[1] Quoted by Ellerton: *Life and Writings*, p. 232.
[2] *The Way Everlasting*, p. 1.

conceptions which are characteristic of the collection as a whole.

All religious experience centres in God, and the Psalms are dominated by the consciousness of His presence, His glory and His grace. There is no argument to prove His existence, because poetry is not the expression of argument but of spiritual experience, and also because, to the Hebrew mind, as to the mind of all the ancient world, no such argument was needed; the existence of God was taken for granted. It is true that there are references in the Psalms to those who say in their heart "There is no God,"[1] but that is only said by "the fool," the morally worthless man, and his attitude is that of a practical atheism rather than a theoretical, for what he really seeks to deny is the possibility of retribution. Against any such attitude the Psalmists do not attempt to reason, though there is one passage which looks so like it that it has been said to contain the germ of a philosophy of religion:

> Consider, ye brutish among the people:
> And ye fools, when will ye be wise?
> He that planted the ear, shall he not hear?
> He that formed the eye, shall he not see?
> He that chastiseth the nations, shall he not correct,
> Even he that teacheth man knowledge?[2]

But this is not the reasoning of a philosopher; it is the indignant expostulation of a poet, who has a vivid consciousness of the presence of an all-seeing and all-knowing God, with those who think they can escape His judgment. There are also some other

[1] Ps. xiv. 1; liii. 1; x. 4. [2] Ps. xciv. 8-10.

passages which remind us of the formal arguments for the existence of God with which systems of theology have familiarised us, such as :

> The heavens declare the glory of God ;
> And the firmament sheweth his handywork.[1]

But here again the Psalmist is not pointing out a "proof" of God's existence ; he is disclosing a "sacrament" of it. The truth he already holds in his own heart, and as he looks up to the heavens he sees the sacred sign or symbol by means of which he can hold it more firmly and give it fresh expression.

For a theology which is grounded in spiritual experience there can only be one God, and, though the Psalms contain passages in which the God of Israel is contrasted with other gods, they do not show any acceptance of the primitive belief in the existence of such gods. When the Psalmist says "There is none like unto thee among the gods, O Lord," [2] he is simply using the poet's licence to borrow imagery from beliefs he does not share to set forth his conception of the uniqueness of the Divine majesty and power. The gods of the nations are mere idols of silver and gold, the work of men's hands :

> They have mouths, but they speak not ;
> Eyes have they, but they see not ;
> They have ears, but they hear not ;
> Noses have they, but they smell not ;
> They have hands, but they handle not ;
> Feet have they, but they walk not ;
> Neither speak they through their throat.[3]

[1] Ps. xix. 1. [2] Ps. lxxxvi. 8.
[3] Ps. cxv. 5-7, cf. cxxxv. 15-17.

But while scorning the gods that are the work of men's hands, the Psalmists are not afraid to speak of God in terms that suggest a human form and the powers possessed by a human personality. They are not philosophers trying to express spiritual realities in colourless abstract words, but poets using concrete and familiar imagery. So they can speak of God's eyes beholding and His eyelids trying the children of men; of His strong hand and stretched-out arm leading out His people; of His ears attentive to their cry. They can describe Him as seated in the heavens with the earth for His footstool; as bowing the heavens to come down and riding upon a cherub. They can picture Him as a warrior returning in triumph from the wars, ascending on high, leading captivity captive and bringing the spoils of victory with Him. They can describe Him as thinking and speaking, knowing and willing, loving and hating. With a boldness that perhaps shocks our sense of reverence they can even speak of God as sleeping, awaking from His sleep, shouting like a drunken man as He smites His enemies, and laughing in derision at them. By such means they express the reality and fullness of personal life in God in the only way in which the popular mind can grasp the truth; they bring us nearer the presence of the *living* God than we get anywhere else in the Bible except in the life and teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ. Superior people may talk about survivals of mythological conceptions or raise objections to what they call "anthropomorphic" or "anthropopathic" language, but it is only through such figures of speech that any personal experience of God can be

expressed. The metaphysical abstractions of the philosopher do not express it; at the best they are negative and give no hint of the warmth and intimacy of such an experience.

What theologians sometimes call "the metaphysical attributes of God" are not, however, bedimmed in any way. With the aid of the poetic imagination of the Psalmists they find expression that is immeasurably more adequate and satisfying than any abstract definition could possibly be. Where has the eternity of God been described in human language equal in power and grandeur to that of the opening verses of the 90th Psalm? And who has ever set forth the conception of the omnipresence of God, or what we to-day call Divine immanence, so majestically as the writer of the 139th Psalm? These are outstanding illustrations of the way in which poetry accomplishes what is utterly beyond either philosophy or theology.

Let it be noted also that such expressions of what we label "metaphysical" truths have always a practical reference for the Psalmists. That can be seen at once by anyone who reads the two Psalms just referred to. Or it may be illustrated from the way in which the thought of God's omnipotence is linked to the thought of His grace:

> He healeth the broken in heart,
> And bindeth up their wounds.
> He telleth the number of the stars;
> He giveth them all their names.[1]

There are no merely speculative conceptions unrelated to the conditions and necessities of life in the

[1] Ps. cxlvii. 3, 4.

Psalms; the value of the truths they express has been tested in experience.

It is, however, not the *metaphysical* attributes of God which the Psalms suggest most constantly but the *moral*—His righteousness and love. And here we recognise at once that the Psalmists achieve what theologians so often fail in, the perfect blending of these two. They know by experience that God's love can never be unrighteous or His righteousness unloving. "A one-sided belief in a mere God of justice (in our sense of the word) could never have produced the Psalter. It needed a God who was conceived as 'righteous in all His ways and loving in all His works,' 'full of pity and compassion, long-suffering and of great loving-kindness'."[1] The word "loving-kindness," which occurs so frequently in the Psalms though it is more often translated "mercy" and sometimes "goodness," suggests this conception. Here is one instance of its use:

Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy (loving-kindness):
For thou renderest to every man according to his work.[2]

Commenting on this passage, Cheyne says: "Loving-kindness is that gracious quality which knits together the members of a community and the parties to a covenant; it is therefore not inconsistent with justice; indeed it is one form of justice. Such a quality in its highest degree alone can unravel the tangled skein of human responsibility, and determine how much in each human life is the 'work' of the man, and how much that of other members of

[1] Montefiore: *Hibbert Lectures*, p. 443. [2] Ps. lxii. 12.

the community. . . . The Psalmists tend to resolve morality into love, as Plato into justice."[1]

Another significant word, describing the gracious condescension of God, is found in Psalm xviii. 35 :

> Thy *gentleness* hath made me great.

The same idea is expressed elsewhere in other words :

> Who is like unto the LORD our God,
> That hath his seat on high,
> That humbleth himself to behold
> The things that are in heaven and in the earth ?
> He raiseth up the poor out of the dust,
> And lifteth up the needy from the dunghill ;
> That he may set him with princes,
> Even with the princes of his people.[2]

This suggests many other passages which speak of the Divine pity and compassion, such as :

> Like as a father pitieth his children,
> So the LORD pitieth them that fear him.[3]

> In the day of trouble he shall keep me secretly in his pavilion :
> In the covert of his tabernacle shall he hide me ;
> He shall lift me up upon a rock.[4]

> I waited patiently for the LORD ;
> And he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.
> He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay ;
> And he set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.[5]

Very many similar utterances will leap to the minds of all who have been accustomed to turn to the

[1] *Book of Psalms* (1888), p. 172.
[2] Ps. cxiii. 5-8.
[3] Ps. ciii. 13.
[4] Ps. xxvii. 5.
[5] Ps. xl. 1, 2.

Psalms for comfort and help, but they may be all summed up in one shout of praise :

> Blessed be the LORD, who daily beareth our burden,
> Even the God who is our salvation.
> God is unto us a God of deliverances ;
> And unto JEHOVAH the Lord belong the issues from death.[1]

But beyond all this, it is in the act of forgiveness that the grace of God is supremely revealed.

> Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies and thy loving-kindnesses ;
> For they have been ever of old.
> Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions :
> According to thy loving-kindness remember thou me,
> For thy goodness' sake, O LORD.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> For thy name's sake, O LORD,
> Pardon my iniquity, for it is great.[2]

Such cries of penitence are heard constantly in the Psalms and there is no doubt as to their being answered. The experience of the penitent souls who thus confessed their sin is unmistakably revealed :

> I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid :
> I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD ;
> And thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.[3]

The names for God used in the Psalms are those which occur throughout the Old Testament. A study of their origin and of the history of their use

[1] Ps. lxviii. 19, 20. [2] Ps. xxv. 6, 7, 11. [3] Ps. xxxii. 5.

is important for any understanding of the development of Old Testament religion, but it is not necessary for an understanding of the conception of God specially revealed in the Psalms. It has to be remembered also that in many instances the name of God has been changed to suit the preferences of those who collected the Psalms for use in common worship. Still, the name most frequently used is the personal name JEHOVAH,[1] which is generally translated in the English Bible by LORD, printed in capital letters. The other name which most frequently occurs is *Elohim* which we translate by God. *Adonai*, translated by Lord (in small letters), is often found, and occasionally two other names meaning Almighty and Most High. But it is more important, for our present purpose, to notice some of the symbols and figures, born of the poetic imagination of the Psalmists, which are used to describe God. Some suggest the strength He is to those who put their trust in Him. He is their Rock, their Tower, their Fortress, their Shield. Others suggest the guidance He gives and the joy He imparts. He is the Sun, the Light, one with Whom is "the fountain of life" and Who is the "cup" of His people's joy. More pregnant still are such symbols as the mother-bird in the shadow of whose wings her brood finds safety, or the shepherd who leads the sheep of his pasture, defending them from harm and supplying all their need.

In such conceptions of the glory and grace of

[1] This familiar form of the word is adopted here though it only represents the consonants of the Hebrew word, the vowels being supplied from the word Adonai (Lord). The original form was JAHVEH or YAHVEH.

God we recognise Old Testament piety at its best, and we see how it was fitted to become the seed-plot of the religion which declares without hesitation or equivocation that the nature of God is Love and the relationship in which He stands to us is that of Father. The Psalmists saw something of the glory of such a God, in flashes and from afar. For the clear and steady shining of the light of that revelation men had to wait until they saw it in the face of Jesus Christ.

Chapter VI

THE SACRAMENT OF NATURE

"Your enjoyment of the world is never right, till every morning you awake in Heaven; see yourself in your Father's Palace; and look upon the skies, the earth, and the air as Celestial Joys. . . . Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and Kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world."—THOMAS TRAHERNE.

CHAPTER VI

THE SACRAMENT OF NATURE

No word corresponding to " Nature " is to be found in the Old Testament. The Hebrew mind knew nothing of a system of external things which could be regarded as an entity and spoken of as a kind of abstract medium between God and the universe. For it the relationship between God and the world was immediate and direct. The idea of an invisible order, or a system of laws, by which all natural events and processes are determined, had not yet been conceived. All natural phenomena were regarded as the result of individual acts of God's will revealing His almighty power accomplishing His purposes. And those purposes were conceived to be moral and religious ; they had to be realised in the life of man ; their ultimate goal was the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. Thus everything in the natural order had a meaning for the life of man, if only he could see it. So the Psalmists looked out on the world through the eye of religion, and, seeing God everywhere, they wondered and adored.[1]

[1] " The world which Hebrew poetry reproduces is not a second world recreated out of the elements of the actual, though separate from reality—a region unto which we are transported by the power of imaginative sympathy. It is the actual world itself. The two living realities, God and the Soul, are face to face, engaged in everlasting colloquy." Butcher : *Harvard Lectures on Greek Subjects*, pp. 14, 15.

This way of regarding nature is so different from that which we find in poetry generally that it is worth some effort to realise the difference and to understand the significance it has for religion. Like other poets the Psalmists delight in the beauty of the natural world, but it is not that delight which is the inspiration of their poetry. We do not, therefore, find in the Psalms that minute and loving description of natural beauty, that dwelling upon it for sheer joy in it and for the pleasure of shaping a varied and vivid expression of it, which is characteristic of some ancient and most modern poetry. This feature of Hebrew poetry is very fully and clearly set forth in R. H. Hutton's essay on *The Poetry of the Old Testament*, from which we may quote the following passage :

" So, too, with the common imagery of modern Christian poetry—mountains, fields, trees. That the Hebrews felt the stateliness of the cedar, knew, too, when ' the power of the hills ' was on them, were alive to the grateful character of the ' leafy spring,' no one who reads their pages can doubt. ' The trees of the Lord are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted.' ' He watereth the hills from his chambers, the earth is satisfied with the fruit of his works.' ' In the Lord put I my trust : how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain ? For lo, the wicked bend their bow,' etc. And yet we never find a single express delineation of the plains of Hebron, or the snows of Lebanon, of sunset in the Mediterranean as the prophets must have seen the sun go down from Mount Carmel, of the valley of the Jordan, or of

the desolate solitudes of the Dead Sea, in all their writings. These things are alluded to, but only and purely to express their higher thoughts of God—as a kind of pictorial language of trust, prophecy or prayer, never from the sense of their individual beauty. '*He* maketh grass to grow upon the mountains.' 'Fire and hail, snow and vapour, stormy winds,' are mentioned; but only as 'fulfilling *his* word.' These things are not beautiful for their own sakes, but glorious only as the instruments of his will." [1]

In this use of imagery from the natural world as "a kind of pictorial language" to set forth truths about God and His relations to man or to describe the experience of man in his need and desire for God, the Psalmists often turn to nature in her gentler aspects and homelier moods. Here the beauty and simplicity of their imagery sometimes reminds us of the parables and similes we find in the teaching of Jesus. The Psalmist also can find an illustration in the natural processes of sowing and reaping:

> Though he goeth on his way weeping, bearing forth the seed;
> He shall come again with joy, bringing his sheaves with him. [2]

Then there are references to the grass which is so soon cut down, to the flower of the field so quickly fading, to the tree planted by the water-side bringing forth its fruit in its season, to the green olive tree and the fruitful vine. The birds and beasts are not forgotten: the sparrow upon the housetop, the

[1] *Literary Essays*, pp. 269, 270. [2] Ps. cxxvi. 6.

swallow building her nest, the eagle and the dove, the owl and the pelican, the cattle upon a thousand hills, the hart panting after the waterbrooks and the sheep wandering in green pastures and beside still waters.

But there are other aspects of nature which arrest the attention of the Psalmists and in contemplation of which they find not only imagery for their thought and experience but great experience itself, the experience of the Presence of the Living God. Nature has her sublime and solemn moods which amaze and awe the soul. And when the Psalmists lift their eyes to behold the strength of the mountains, when they stand overwhelmed by the terrifying grandeur of the storm, when they gaze upon the splendour of the heavens, the poet in them is lost in the worshipper. It is not meanings, symbols, similes or figures of speech that they discover but the great Reality. Their attitude is that of William Blake who said: "I assert, for myself, that I do not behold the outward creation, and that to me it is hindrance and not action. 'What!' it will be questioned, 'when the sun rises, do you not see a round disc of fire somewhat like a guinea?' Oh! no, no! I see an innumerable company of the heavenly host, crying, 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty!' I question not my corporeal eye any more than I would question a window concerning a sight. I look through it, and not with it."[1]

Perhaps the most outstanding example of this attitude to be found in the whole collection is the 29th Psalm. The thunderstorm has always appealed to man's sense of awe and dread, and various poems

[1] *A Vision of the Last Judgment.*

have come down to us from ancient times containing vivid imaginative expression of this feeling. But nowhere are we so immediately led into the very spirit of the storm as in this Psalm :

The voice of the LORD is upon the waters :
The God of glory thundereth,
Even the LORD upon great waters,
The voice of the LORD is powerful ;
The voice of the LORD is full of majesty.
The voice of the LORD breaketh the cedars ;
Yea, the LORD breaketh in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
He maketh them also to skip like a calf ;
Lebanon and Sirion like a young wild-ox.
The voice of the LORD heweth out flames of fire.
The voice of the LORD shaketh the wilderness ;
The LORD shaketh the wilderness of Kadesh.
The voice of the LORD maketh the hinds to calve,
And strippeth the forests bare :
And in his temple everything saith, Glory.

Here we see the storm travelling the whole length of the land from Lebanon in the North to Kadesh in the South. The pealing thunder shakes the mountains and the scenery is lit up by the flashes of lightning which break from the clouds. And yet it is not the storm of which we are conscious, but God in the storm. The thunder is His voice ; the lightning is the terrible shining of His glory ; the storm is a manifestation of His presence, and the Psalm which describes it is a hymn of the Divine advent. Like Blake when he saw the sun rise, the Psalmist looks beyond the natural world to the spiritual ; through the awful magnificence of the storm he sees the heavenly palace and hears everything in it saying, Glory.

Sometimes the expression of the experience of God's presence in the phenomena of the natural world is to be found in the Psalms in a less direct fashion. The 18th Psalm also describes the coming of God in earthquake and storm, but here it would seem that the poet has used his imagination to construct, out of various past experiences, an idealised picture of the way God has come to his help in times of trouble and danger through which he has passed. Doubtless there is a remembrance of times in which he has felt God's presence in the thunderstorm and the earthquake, but it is not those experiences he is now directly concerned with; he only uses them as poetic material by means of which to express the larger experience of his whole life. Nevertheless the same essential attitude towards nature is revealed here as in the 29th Psalm.

So also is it in the 19th Psalm as the Psalmist sees the glory of God manifest in the heavens; in the 93rd, as he gazes upon the stormy sea; in the 8th (which we shall consider in our next chapter from another point of view) where his eye sweeps through the whole universe and comprehends in one view the splendours of the heavens and "the beasts of the field, the fowl of the air and the fish of the sea." It is the Divine Presence in nature that makes it so significant. The natural world is not *consciously* valued for its own sake but only as an expression of the spiritual world.[1] And the Psalmists did not

[1] "It is not easy to conceive a sublimer characteristic of the Hebrew poetry than this, that it treats all creation as a mere shadow; and finds the essence of its beauty, as well as the sustaining power of its life, in the spiritual world." Hutton: *Literary Essays*, p. 271.

come to the spiritual world through nature; they found it first in history and experience.

Here we see the greatest difference between the Psalmists' attitude to nature and that which is characteristic of much modern poetry. Theirs was not the attitude of one who rose through the contemplation of nature to God; not the attitude of Wordsworth when he said:

> "I have felt
> A presence that disturbs me with the joy
> Of elevated thoughts: a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man:
> A motion and a spirit, that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
> And rolls through all things."

It was rather the attitude of John Masefield's converted blackguard, who, having found God in his own soul, had his eyes opened to perceive His glory in the commonest and most familiar things:

> "O glory of the lighted mind.
> How dead I'd been, how dumb, how blind.
> The station brook, to my new eyes,
> Was babbling out of Paradise;
> The waters rushing from the rain
> Were singing Christ has risen again.
> I thought all earthly creatures knelt
> From rapture of the joy I felt.
> The narrow station-wall's brick ledge,
> The wild hop withering in the hedge,
> The lights in huntsman's upper storey
> Were parts of an eternal glory,
> Were God's eternal garden flowers.
> I stood in bliss at this for hours."

We may express the truth for ourselves by saying that nature is not so much a revelation of God as a sacrament of His presence. The worth of a sacrament is only for those who know in their own souls something, at least, of the reality it expresses. Modern romanticism has fostered an emotional attitude towards nature which is often mistaken for religious experience. There is a vast difference between pantheistic reverie and communion with God. While we may find much in nature to enrich our religious experience and enhance the joy of communion with God, the origin of that experience and the basis of that communion is found elsewhere. As one profoundly spiritual thinker has put it: "No outward Revelation can enlighten us spiritually while we resist the Divine Spirit within us. While so resisting, no beauty of the lily, no glory of the sun in the firmament, no return of seed-time and harvest, nor gift of rain from heaven and fruitful seasons, will work faith in us."[1] This truth has been hidden from those who have had a passionate sense of the beauty of nature and made that their religion. One who sought to do so but discovered his mistake has recorded his experience in a superb passage of an immortal poem and his conclusion is:

"Nature, poor stepdame, cannot slake my drouth;
Let her, if she would owe me,
Drop yon blue bosom-veil of sky, and show me
The breasts o' her tenderness:
Never did any milk of hers once bless
My thirsting mouth."[2]

[1] J. McLeod Campbell: *Thoughts on Revelation*, pp. 97-8.
[2] Francis Thompson: *The Hound of Heaven.*

And in one of his essays he expressed it more fully: "Absolute Nature lives not in our life, nor yet is lifeless, but lives in the life of God: and in so far, and so far merely, as man lives in that life, does he come into sympathy with Nature, and Nature with him. She is God's daughter, who stretches her hand only to her Father's friends. Not Shelley, not Wordsworth himself, ever drew so close to the heart of Nature as did the Seraph of Assisi, who was close to the Heart of God." [1]

But when we think of a "Sacrament," in the sense in which the word is used in the Christian religion, we think of something that is not only an outward and visible sign of a reality of which we have some inward and spiritual experience, but also a means by which that inward experience is deepened and enriched; something by which God "doth not only quicken, but also strengthen and confirm our faith in Him." [2] This is also true of nature as the Psalmists regarded it. In the 29th Psalm, which we have already considered, the outcome of the experience of the Presence of God in the storm is the strengthening of faith and confidence in Him:

> The LORD will give strength unto his people;
> The LORD will bless his people with peace.

And when another Psalmist, exiled from his native land, thinks of the roaring cataracts of the Upper Jordan, the mountain torrents blend, in his imagination, with the waves of trouble which overwhelm him and he recognises that both are under the Divine

[1] Francis Thompson: *Prose Works*, p. 82. Cf. also a fine sermon on "Nature" in Mozley's *University Sermons*.
[2] Articles of Religion, XXV.

direction and control. So the light of hope breaks through his sorrow and he cries :

> Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime,
> And in the night his song shall be with me,
> Even a prayer unto the God of my life.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Why art thou cast down, O my soul ?
> And why art thou disquieted within me ?
> Hope thou in God : for I shall yet praise him,
> Who is the health of my countenance, and my God.[1]

Even when it is the revelation of God in history rather than in nature that the Psalmist is concerned with, he can use the Divine operations in the natural world to amplify and enrich his thought. The God of nature and the God of history are one, and it is necessary to consider His works in both spheres to obtain any true conception of Him. So in the 65th Psalm the thought of Him who " by his strength setteth fast the mountains," who " stilleth the roaring of the seas," who makes " the outgoings of the morning and evening to rejoice," who visits the earth and waters it and crowns the year with His goodness—all contributes to strengthen faith and establish the confidence that :

> By terrible things thou wilt answer us in righteousness,
> O God of our salvation ;
> Thou that art the confidence of all the ends of the earth,
> And of them that are afar off upon the sea.

[1] Ps. xlii. 8, 11.

Sometimes, however, the ministry of nature to the soul is to be found not in any immediate practical necessity to which the truth it suggests applies, but in the provision of a theme for devout meditation as part of the act of worship. The most outstanding example of this among the Psalms is the 104th. This is a great hymn of Creation and in its arrangement the story of the first chapter of Genesis is followed. The order of the days of creation is observed, but the Genesis material is used with freedom and the Psalmist introduces a good many original touches. The dominant thought is that of the glory and majesty of God :

> O LORD my God, thou art very great;
> Thou art clothed with honour and majesty.
> Who coverest thyself with light as with a garment;
> Who stretchest out the heavens like a curtain :
> Who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters;
> Who maketh the clouds his chariot;
> Who walketh upon the wings of the wind.

But side by side with this goes the thought of the faithfulness of God to His creatures. He has made gracious provision for all their need.

> He watereth the mountains from his chambers :
> The earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works.
> He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle,
> And herb for the service of man;
>
> . . . . . .
>
> The trees of the LORD are satisfied
> The cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted;
>
> . . . . . .

The young lions roar after their prey,
And seek their meat from God.

. . . . . .

These wait all upon thee,
That thou mayest give them their meat in due season.

This Psalm gives us, says Sir George Adam Smith, "a more comprehensive view of the Holy Land than any other Scripture, for it embraces both atmosphere and scenery—wind, water and light, summer and winter, mountain, valley and sea, man and the wild beasts."[1] Yet, be it always remembered, the Psalmist's purpose is not to describe atmosphere and scenery but to express the grateful adoration which fills his heart. The outcome of his worshipful meditation upon nature reveals the attitude of the entire Book of Psalms upon this subject:

O Lord, how manifold are thy works!
In wisdom hast thou made them all:
The earth is full of thy riches.

Modern science has immeasurably enlarged our knowledge of the natural world. In its light many of the ideas of the Psalmists seem simple and crude. Yet all modern science may be regarded as a commentary on the text just quoted. As Professor J. A. Thomson says at the end of his Gifford Lectures on *The System of Animate Nature*: "The facts of the case are so wonderful that no general impression of Nature reached along scientific or any other lines can be even in the direction of being true

[1] *Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 103.

that does not sound the note of joyous appreciation and reverent wonder." And modern poetry, though its general attitude to nature is so different from that which we find in the Psalms, can sound this note :

> "I heard the universal choir,
> The Sons of Light exalt their Sire
> With universal song,
> Earth's lowliest and loudest notes,
> Her million times ten thousand throats
> Exalt Him loud and long,
> And lips and lungs and tongues of Grace
> From every part and every place
> Within the shining of His face,
> The universal throng."[1]

[1] Ralph Hodgson : *The Song of Honour.*

Chapter VII

THE NATURE AND NEED OF MAN

"In the Psalms we see the soul in the secret of its workings, in the variety and play of its many-sided and subtly-compounded nature—loving, hoping, fearing, despairing, exulting, repenting, aspiring—the soul, conscious of the greatness and sweetness of its relations to Almighty God, and penetrated by them to the very quick; longing, thirsting, gasping, after the glimpses that visit it, of His goodness and beauty—awestruck before the unsearchableness of His judgment, silent before the certainty of His righteousness—opening, like a flower to the sun, in the presence of His light, of the immensity of His loving-kindness."—R. W. Church.

CHAPTER VII

THE NATURE AND NEED OF MAN

Just as the Psalmists look on the natural world with the reverent eye of the worshipper fascinated by the signs and symbols of the glory of God, so is it when they deal with the nature and need of man. Their gaze is still fixed on God and their mind occupied with thoughts of His power and grace. They see man in relation to Him. When they think of God's faithfulness to all His dependent creatures they place man among them,[1] but they realise that he holds a different position from all others, for to him the others are subservient and in his interests God orders and controls all natural forces and processes. So, in the Psalms, the devout worshipper is always conscious of the great paradox of religious experience. He feels his littleness as a creature of a few, short, swift years of time; a being subject to sin and misery; one who is weak and helpless in face of the mighty forces of nature wielded by the hand of God. But, at the same time, he recognises the greatness that belongs to him as the crown of God's creation; the object of His care; the recipient of the greatest privilege He can bestow, that of friendship and communion with Himself.

[1] Ps. civ. 14, 15, 23.

Nowhere is this view more strikingly set forth than in the 8th Psalm. The whole purpose of this Psalm is to magnify the condescending grace of God, but in doing this it reveals both the lowliness and the dignity of man. With a poetic insight which all advance of scientific knowledge cannot invalidate, the Psalmist sets forth the contrast between the most majestic phenomena of nature and the puny insignificance of man :

> When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
> The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained ;
> What is man, that thou art mindful of him ?
> And the son of man that thou visitest him ?

But the very contrast enhances the sense of man's value, as well as of God's grace, for God *is* mindful of him and *does* visit him. Moreover, God has given him a most exalted place in the order of being, made him little less than divine,[1] and put him in authority over all lesser creatures.

The 8th Psalm is a song of praise. It begins and ends on the same note :

> " O Lord, our Lord,
> How excellent is thy name in all the earth ! "

But the same view of the nature of man is implied

[1] The word is *Elohim*. It means " gods," and is used elsewhere for the gods of the heathen and for supernatural beings (1 Sam. xxviii. 13). It is also used throughout the Old Testament with a singular verb for " God " (see p. 82). Its meaning in this passage is uncertain. The Greek version of the O.T. rendered it " angels," and this has been followed by the A.V. The R.V. regards this as one of the instances in which it means " God." There seems, however, to be little reason why it should not be translated " gods," as the use of such a poetical figure of speech does not imply a belief in the real existence of heathen divinities. To render it by the adjective " divine " perhaps gives the sense of the passage most accurately in modern speech.

in many Psalms which have the character of prayer. They show the nature of man as it expresses itself in his need. And that need at its highest and deepest is always the need for God. The Psalmists felt instinctively and overpoweringly the truth which is expressed in the familiar words of Augustine: "Thou hast made us for Thyself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee." This passion for God comes out again and again in the Psalms. It may be that it is sometimes the desire and longing of the religious community, cut off from the precious ordinances of worship, that is expressed, but even so it is such desire as it is felt by an individual and there is an intensely personal note in its utterance:

As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks,
So panteth my soul after thee, O God.[1]

O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee:
My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee
In a dry and weary land, where no water is.[2]

Sometimes it is through circumstances of trial and suffering that this instinctive need of man for God finds passionate utterance:

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?
Why are thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

. . . . . .

Be not thou far off, O LORD:
O thou my succour, haste thee to help me.[3]

Hear my prayer, O LORD,
And let my cry come unto thee.
Hide not thy face from me in the day of my distress:
Incline thine ear unto me;
In the day when I call answer me speedily.[4]

[1] Ps. xlii. 1. [2] Ps. lxiii. 1. [3] Ps. xxii. 1, 19. [4] Ps. cii. 1, 2.

The Psalms are full of the cries of tempted souls and troubled hearts which witness to man's need for God, and it is this characteristic more than any other which has led humble and devout souls of all ages to use their language in prayer.

Blended with this consciousness of the need for God we sometimes find another strain which, to our ears, at first, does not seem to be in harmony with it. There appears to be a spirit of self-righteousness in some of the Psalmists which makes them claim God's help as a right which is due to them. They describe themselves by such words as *pure*, *righteous* and *perfect*, and, therefore, deserving God's favour, while others are *wicked* or *ungodly* and, therefore, objects of God's anger and hatred :

> I was also perfect with him,
> And I kept myself from mine iniquity.
> Therefore hath the LORD recompensed me according to my righteousness,
> According to the cleanness of my hands in his eyesight.[1]

> Judge me, O LORD ; for I have walked in mine integrity :
> I have trusted also in the LORD without wavering.[2]

We are mistaken, however, if we find in such language the self-complacency of the Pharisee who thanks God that he is not as other men. The words in question must be understood generally as only claiming that honesty and sincerity of purpose which belongs to one who is seeking to know and do the will of God revealed in the Covenant with His people. One word that is sometimes translated

[1] Ps. xviii. 23, 24. [2] Ps. xxvi. 1.

"godly," but more often "saints," comes from the same root as the word "loving-kindness," which we have already discussed.[1] It means those who are the objects of God's loving-kindness, and this is suggested by the marginal rendering of Psalm iv. 3, in the R.V., "one that he favoureth." Really it refers to the members of the nation with whom God has entered into a gracious covenant relationship. It may be admitted that, when all allowances are made, such words and phrases fall short of the deeply spiritual conception of man's sinfulness and undeservingness which is taught in the New Testament. But there is no lack of recognition of the thorough and disastrous infection of human nature by sin and the necessity for the purification of the very springs of motive and action:

> Who can discern his errors?
> Clear thou me from hidden faults.
> Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins;
> Let them not have dominion over me.[2]
>
> Enter not into judgment with thy servant;
> For in thy sight shall no man living be justified.[3]

Such passages as these are borrowed to express the deepest penitence of the most tender and sensitive Christian conscience. And beyond all the brief utterances of the sense of sin to be found in the Psalms stands the whole 51st Psalm, in which the writer heaps metaphor upon metaphor to express his profound consciousness of sin and his desire for the complete renewal of his spiritual being that he

[1] See p. 79. [2] Ps. xix. 12, 13. [3] Ps. cxliii. 2.

may enter into vital communion with God. Nowhere in the Old Testament has the inward corruption of man's heart and his entire dependence upon God for righteousness been so fully expressed as in this Psalm.

There are two problems, closely linked together, which have always beset the faith of devout thinking men, which find a place in the Psalms, as they do in almost all general expressions of religious experience. They are the problems of undeserved suffering and of life after death. We shall deal with them briefly here as they arise from a consideration of the nature and need of man.

Like so many others, the Psalmists found it difficult to reconcile the facts of life with faith in the righteous rule of God. The lot of men did not always correspond to their character. Often the good had to suffer while the wicked prospered. The supreme discussion of this problem in the Old Testament is the Book of Job, but it arises again and again in the experience of the Prophets and the Psalmists. The 73rd Psalm utters the perplexity of faith more fully and clearly than any other :

> For I was envious at the arrogant,
> When I saw the prosperity of the wicked.
> For there are no bands in their death :
> But their strength is firm.
> They are not in trouble as other men ;
> Neither are they plagued like other men.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Behold, these are the wicked ;
> And, being alway at ease, they increase in riches.
> Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart,

And washed my hands in innocency;
For all the day long have I been plagued,
And chastened every morning.[1]

The Psalmists sought to resolve this problem in various ways, but they did not attain any complete or final solution. Indeed, no such solution was possible under Old Testament conditions. Even the Christian revelation has not dispersed all the mystery which surrounds the question, though it has shown a light upon it, streaming from the Cross of Christ, which makes an immeasurable difference and is all that men need to walk by.

The first thought in which the Psalmists found some help was that the prosperity of the wicked was only for a short time, and the favour of God which seemed to have been withdrawn from the righteous would soon be restored to him. A full exposition of this idea is given in the 37th Psalm:

Fret not thyself because of evil doers,
Neither be thou envious against them that work unrighteousness.
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb.

. . . . . .

For evil doers shall be cut off:
But those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the land.

. . . . . .

I have seen the wicked in great power,
And spreading himself like a green tree in its native soil.
But one passed by, and, lo, he was not:
Yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.
Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright:
For the latter end of that man is peace.

[1] Ps. lxxiii. 3-14.

The same thought is expressed in the 73rd Psalm :

> Surely thou settest them in slippery places :
> Thou castest them down to destruction.
> How are they become a desolation in a moment !
> They are utterly consumed with terrors.
> As a dream when one awaketh ;
> So, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.[1]

But along with this thought another can be seen struggling into consciousness. The Psalmists recognise that true well-being is to be found in the enjoyment of fellowship with God. In the 37th Psalm there is a suggestion of it :

> Delight thyself also in the LORD ;
> And he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.
> . . . . . .
> Rest in the LORD and wait patiently for him.[2]

The changing of the conditions which are so perplexing is nevertheless still looked for in this Psalm. In the 73rd Psalm it is different. The Psalmist anticipates the overthrow of the wicked, but he realises that he has been mistaken in thinking of the blessedness of the righteous as dependent on any material or physical circumstances. It lies wholly in a fellowship with God which no troubles or disasters can interrupt :

> Nevertheless I am continually with thee :
> Thou hast holden my right hand.
> Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel,
> And afterward receive me to glory.
> Whom have I in heaven but thee ?

[1] Ps. lxxiii. 18-20. [2] Ps. xxxvii. 4, 7.

And there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.
My flesh and my heart faileth :
But God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever.[1]

Here we seem to see the first gleam of the dawning of a great light upon the problem. This Psalmist appears to be convinced that not only are the troubles and disasters of life powerless to interrupt his fellowship with God, but even death itself cannot destroy it. Why then, we are inclined to ask, all this urgency about things being set right here and now ? Why not rest in the assurance that things will be set right in another life beyond the grave ?

This brings us to the Psalmists' attitude to the future state. We are so accustomed to read the Old Testament in the light of the completed revelation we have in the New that it is difficult for us to realise the position of the Psalmists on this question. Yet the effort to do so is well worth while and we need not fear that we shall lose anything by it. The Psalms will not become less precious, but more so, as we recognise them to be expressions of spiritual experience through which God was still revealing Himself and leading men on to the larger and richer conceptions which we have been privileged to receive through Christ. Having regarded them from this historic point of view in our study and exposition of their meaning, we shall be perfectly free to use their language, in the light of the completed revelation to which they point, for the purposes of Christian worship and devotion.

It must be realised then that the Jewish doctrine of the Resurrection, which we find generally held in

[1] Ps. lxxiii. 23-26.

New Testament times (though the sect of the Sadducees still denied it), was a late development and is not expressed in the Old Testament, though some approach to it may be discovered there. The general belief throughout the Old Testament is that departed spirits find their abode in Sheol. This Hebrew word has been translated in our A.V. sometimes by "the grave" and sometimes by "hell," but it is better to leave the word untranslated, as is usual in the R.V. Sheol is regarded as a place of darkness and chaos; its inhabitants are conceived as feeble and ineffective; existence there is deprived of all that makes it worth having. Living men must dread it, not as a condition of punishment, but as a shadowy and cheerless state, in which there is no distinction between high and low, rich and poor, good and bad; no fellowship with God or consciousness of His favour; and from which there is no return to the former vigour of life or emergence to any higher and better state. Three other words are occasionally used in the Old Testament to describe the same place or state, and they serve to illustrate some of the ideas associated with it. One is the usual word for a pit or a well; another word is also generally translated "pit," but sometimes "corruption"; and the third is the word *Abaddon*, which our English versions render "Destruction." The general conception of this state may be illustrated by quotations from the Psalms in which each of these words occur:

> For in death there is no remembrance of thee:
> In Sheol who shall give thee thanks?[1]

[1] Ps. vi. 5.

I am counted with them that go down into the pit;
I am as a man that hath no help:
Cast off among the dead,
Like the slain that lie in the grave,
Whom thou rememberest no more;
And they are cut off from thy hand.[1]

What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?
Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth?[2]

Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead?
Shall the shades arise and praise thee?
Shall thy loving-kindness be declared in the grave?
Or thy faithfulness in Abaddon?
Shall thy wonders be known in the dark?
And thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?[3]

This is the attitude of mind to the question of life after death reflected in the Psalms. But there are just a few passages which so clearly suggest to our minds the hope which was born to a later Judaism that we find it hard to believe that the men who wrote them did not catch at least a glimpse of that hope, seeing it and greeting it from afar:

For thou wilt not leave my soul to Sheol;
Neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption.
Thou wilt shew me the path of life:
In thy presence is fulness of joy;
In thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.[4]

As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness:
I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.[5]

But God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol:
For he shall receive me.[6]

[1] Ps. lxxxviii. 4, 5. [2] Ps. xxx. 9. [3] Ps. lxxxviii. 10-12.
[4] Ps. xvi. 10, 11. [5] Ps. xvii. 15. [6] Ps. xlix. 15.

It is, however, quite possible to interpret each of these passages as referring to a deliverance from death by the restoration of health and strength and the renewal of the experience of fellowship with God on this side of the grave. There are several other passages, couched in very similar language, which obviously have that meaning.[1] Nevertheless, these passages contain the germ out of which a doctrine of immortality must eventually develop. As men came to know more fully such fellowship with God they must realise that it could not be limited to the few short years of this life. This, as we have already seen, is what the writer of the 73rd Psalm seems to have felt, and in his words, which we have quoted, the hope of immortality in the Old Testament reaches its high-water mark. There are, it is true, two other passages of an apocalyptic character which explicitly refer to a physical resurrection upon earth to take place at the inauguration of the Messianic age.[2] But the purely spiritual conception of an immortality in fellowship with God, escaping the darkness and wretchedness of Sheol, is nowhere so foreshadowed in the Old Testament as in this Psalm. Both the physical and the spiritual forms of the idea of resurrection had their influence upon later Jewish doctrine and through it upon New Testament teaching. But it is along the line of the Psalmist's approach that we reach the supreme argument for immortality, to which our Lord pointed when he said : " God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." [3] It is as a result of com-

[1] Cf. Ps. ix. 13 ; xxx. 3 ; lxxxvi. 13 ; ciii. 4.
[2] Isa. xxvi. 19 ; Dan. xii. 2. [3] Matt. xxii. 32.

munion with God that we may win the sure and certain hope of everlasting life.

In conclusion we may remind ourselves that, though life and immortality have been brought to light through the Gospel, we still have to make the venture of faith, as the Psalmists did. One commentator has expressed their attitude in words that can hardly be improved upon: "This is precisely the heroic element in Old Testament faith, that, even when surrounded by the enigmas of this present life and in view of the future which loses itself in dark night, it casts itself unconditionally into God's arms."[1] To teach and inspire such faith is the greatest thing the Psalms can do for us in regard to the problems of suffering and of death, and that is far more than if they had dispersed the mystery which enshrouds our present life or removed the veil which hides the future.

[1] Delitzsch: *Commentary on the Psalms*, vol. 2, p. 34.

Chapter VIII

THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN HISTORY

"What are all our Histories and other Traditions of Actions in former times but God manifesting Himself, that He hath shaken, and tumbled down, and trampled upon, everything that He hath not planted?"—
OLIVER CROMWELL.

CHAPTER VIII

THE DIVINE PURPOSE IN HISTORY

THERE is a sense in which all religions are historical. They take their rise in certain conditions and circumstances which existed at some particular time and place. Their origins can be explored by the methods of the historian and, though such methods may not reveal the secret of their hold upon the mind and heart of those who cherished the faith, they do help us to understand the external progress and development of the religious systems and institutions. The religion of Israel is, however, a historical religion in a fuller and deeper sense than this. The divine revelation of which it is the outcome is found in the history of a people whose career is shown to be the work of God. Speaking of the rise of this religion under the influence of Moses, one scholar has summed up the position thus: "A manifest work of God, a prophet of God to interpret it, a community of men who had experienced and understood it—such were the conditions under which the new religion arose. It was based neither upon the order of nature as a whole nor upon the manifestation of any particular force of nature, but was called forth by events in human history, events in the spiritual life of men."[1]

[1] Guthe: *Encyl. Bib. col.* 2221.

These words may be used not only of the rise of the religion of Israel but of all the successive stages of its growth and development. There were ever fresh works of God manifest and there was a noble succession of prophets to interpret them to the community which had experienced them. The inspired preaching of the Prophets constantly took history for its text, and the Psalms reveal the same attitude.

Besides the passing allusions to history which may be found throughout the whole collection, there are several Psalms which are entirely devoted to the religious consideration of historical events. The 78th, 105th and 106th Psalms contain extensive reviews of long periods of national history. The 78th traces the history of the people from the Exodus to the time of David, when God's choice of Judah and His rejection of Ephraim was finally revealed. It is based upon the earliest of the narratives which now form part of the Pentateuch, but the old stories are freely dealt with and used by the poet to illustrate his theme, which is the celebration of the mercy and goodness of God to the house and kingdom of David. The 105th and 106th Psalms deal with history in a similar way, but in the former the note of thanksgiving predominates, while the latter is a confession of national sin and failure, apparently specially arranged for use in liturgical worship.

We need to realise how far these Psalms are removed from merely national poems which glorify the traditions and achievements of a people. It is always God's grace and favour that is in view, not

the heroism and achievement of national heroes or the merits and qualities of the nation itself. The nation is distinguished from all others, but not on account of anything in itself; it is distinguished solely by the divine choice and election. Through all the vicissitudes of national experience the guiding hand of God is recognised and a purpose, not as yet realised, is believed to be in view. The fulfilment of that purpose is hindered and delayed but only by the people's forgetfulness and disobedience. If they will only listen to the word of God and obey it, nothing can thwart the gracious end He has in view for them :

> Oh that my people would hearken unto me,
> That Israel would walk in my ways !
> I should soon subdue their enemies,
> And turn my hand against their adversaries.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> He should feed them also with the finest of the wheat :
> And with honey out of the rock should I satisfy thee.[1]

The Psalmists knew how to read their history as a revelation of God and to use its lessons for the enrichment of their faith and the quickening of their conscience. The strength and the limitations of their point of view in this respect, with its abiding significance for us, is well summed up in the following words : "Their knowledge was imperfect, their philosophy exceedingly simple; they had not gained a clear perspective, they did not understand the action and reaction of subtle processes persisting through long periods. They could not recognise, as we may, that their religion had gained richness and

[1] Ps. lxxxi. 13, 14, 16.

strength through conflict with the customs that they now regarded as superstitious and idolatrous. They at times cherished a narrowness that was inconsistent with the higher elements of their faith and their lofty claims for their God, but some great facts of permanent value they saw clearly. That history has its lessons which need to be reverently pondered; that the nation has come to greatness and individuality because of God's choice and guidance; that great men, as Moses, Samuel and David, played an important part and left a noble inheritance; that national misfortune comes not from blind fate, but often from the stupidity of men who fail to hear the Divine voice; that these great things are to be taught to our children so that they may be fitted for real statesmanship and true-service—is there not something in all this that we need to consider in our own day?"[1]

The Psalmists' view of the divine purpose in history is not, however, bounded by the fortunes of Israel. They recognise that all nations are subject to God's authority and included in His purposes:

> The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof;
> The world, and they that dwell therein.[2]
>
> He ruleth by his might for ever;
> His eyes observe the nations.[3]
>
> From the place of his habitation he looketh forth
> Upon all the inhabitants of the earth;
> He that fashioneth the hearts of them all,
> That considereth all their works.[4]

[1] Jordan: *Religion in Song*, pp. 111-2.
[2] Ps. xxiv. 1.
[3] Ps. lxvi. 7.
[4] Ps. xxxiii. 14, 15.

And while the nations have often set themselves against God's purposes and brought upon themselves a righteous punishment, the time will come when they will acknowledge Him and share the privilege which is possessed by His chosen people.

All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn
unto the LORD:
And all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before
thee.
For the kingdom is the LORD's:
And he is ruler over the nations.[1]

God reigneth over the nations:
God sitteth upon his holy throne.
The princes of the peoples are gathered together
To be the people of the God of Abraham:
For the shields of the earth belong unto God;
He is greatly exalted.[2]

O thou that hearest prayer,
Unto thee shall all flesh come.[3]

All nations whom thou hast made shall come and
worship before thee, O Lord;
And they shall glorify thy name.[4]

It is always Israel that is to be the means of the conversion of the nations and Jerusalem that is to be the centre of the world-wide reign of Jehovah, enrolling among its citizens members of once hostile nations, such as Egypt and Babylon, Philistia and Tyre.[5]

But the Psalmists do not always regard their enemies from such a point of view as this. Some-

[1] Ps. xxii. 27, 28. [2] Ps. xlvii. 8, 9. [3] Ps. lxv. 2.
[4] Ps. lxxxvi. 9. [5] Ps. lxxxvii. 4.

times, instead of thinking of their possible conversion, they seem to find a bitter satisfaction in contemplating their destruction. This may take the form of a prayer for retribution upon the heathen who have oppressed them, as in the 79th Psalm :

Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that know thee not,
And upon the kingdoms that call not upon thy name.
For they have devoured Jacob,
And laid waste his habitation.

. . . . . .

Let the revenging of the blood of thy servants which is shed
Be known among the heathen in our sight.

. . . . . .

And render unto our neighbours sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord.[1]

Such prayers for retribution are frequently found in other portions of the Old Testament besides the Psalms. We must remember that they came from men whose standpoint was that of the law of retaliation, and they are not to be judged by the standard of the New Testament. Our Lord explicitly stated the contrast between the old point of view and the new ideal which He proclaimed : " Ye have heard that it was said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy : but I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in Heaven." [2] It must be recognised that these prayers do not spring from a base spirit of personal vindictiveness, but from a genuine and passionate

[1] Ps. lxxix. 6, 7, 10, 12. [2] Matt. v. 43-45.

zeal for the cause of God. The Nation's enemies are His foes and their overthrow is looked for as a result of the inevitable working of the divine righteousness.

But there are some passages in the Psalms which seem to go beyond the bounds of prayer for righteous retribution and partake of the character of curses.

> Let his days be few ;
> And let another take his office.
> Let his children be fatherless,
> And his wife a widow.
> Let his children be vagabonds, and beg ;
> And let them seek their bread out of their desolate places.
> Let the extortioner catch all that he hath ;
> And let strangers make spoil of his labour.
> Let there be none to extend mercy unto him ;
> Neither let there be any to have pity on his fatherless children.[1]

It is difficult to conceive a series of more dreadful anathemas than we have in this Psalm, and it is hardly in the spirit of pure prayer that they are uttered. They are like the curses which the ancient world employed, believing them to possess an inherent power to bring about the doom they invoked. The words that Shakespeare uses of curses express an idea that was very powerful in the mind of all primitive peoples :

> " I will not think but they ascend the sky,
> And there awake God's gentle-sleeping peace." [2]

The ancient Hebrews certainly shared that belief, and though the Psalmist had passed beyond it and

[1] Ps. cix. 8-12. [2] *Richard the Third*, Act I, Scene III.

therefore did not regard his words as possessing any magical power of self-fulfilment, it is the old fierce way of speaking into which he falls. Doubtless he had terrible provocation, but his maledictions cannot be justified even by the highest Old Testament standards, and no adaptation or interpretation of his words can make them a fitting expression of Christian devotion.

It is only in a few instances that we find such passionate vindictive feeling dominating the mind of the Psalmists, but occasionally it breaks out when the mood which inspires their utterance is quite different. The 137th Psalm contains the most notable example of this. This Psalm is a beautiful lyric of ardent patriotism, unsurpassed in all the poetry which has been written under the influence of truest love for home and country. But at its close it is marred by a terrible outburst of implacable hatred :

" Happy shall he be, that rewardeth thee
As thou hast served us.
Happy shall he be, that taketh and dasheth thy little ones
Against the rock."

These words send a shudder through our souls. The horror and cruelty of ancient methods of war rise up before us. We realise how natural the cry for vengeance was and we respect the agony of men whose sufferings and wrongs moved them to such utterances. Indeed we know how similar feelings rise in our own hearts under similar provocation. The literature of Christian lands, utterances from Christian pulpits, even the words of Christian

prayer, in times of religious and national conflicts, have not been free from outbursts of this kind. But our understanding and sympathy must not make us palliate in any way expressions of hatred and cries for revenge. Still less may we excuse our own failure to attain the spirit of love and show the grace of forgiveness by the example of those whose light and knowledge were far below that which we are privileged to enjoy.

Nevertheless there is something which these imprecatory utterances in the Psalms reveal that is always needed, and that is a great passion for righteousness. Granted, this passion occasionally takes extreme and unjustifiable forms, but even so it may be better than that easy-going spirit of toleration which makes nothing of moral distinctions and shows a careless indifference to injustice, cruelty and wrong. The Christian's prayer should be :

> "O may I love like Thee,
> In all Thy footsteps tread !
> Thou hatest all iniquity,
> But nothing Thou hast made.
> O may I learn the art
> With meekness to reprove,
> To hate the sin with all my heart,
> But still the sinner love ! "[1]

There is no true, deep love for the sinner which can be substituted for a righteous hatred of his sin. Christianity recognises, with fear and trembling, that there is such a thing as "the wrath of the Lamb."

[1] Charles Wesley.

Chapter IX

IDEALS PROPHETIC OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM

"Never has any people been so conscious of its own spiritual calling as the Jews; none has had so profound an intuition of the future. . . . They were content to suffer and to wait. They had all the tenacity of hope."—S. H. Butcher.

CHAPTER IX

IDEALS PROPHETIC OF CHRIST AND HIS KINGDOM

One of the reasons why the Psalms are so precious to Christians is that they can be readily applied to illustrate the life and experiences of our Lord and the spiritual blessings which are realised in His Kingdom. Indeed, so great is their value for this purpose that it has been widely assumed that they were written with this end expressly in view. From the time of the early Christian Fathers, almost to the present day, the general tradition of interpretation treated the whole Psalter as Messianic and found Christ in every Psalm. The more modern disciples of the tradition have, however, limited the strict application of this principle to certain Psalms. In the Bampton Lectures for 1876, Bishop Alexander, one of the best representatives of this school, said that these Messianic Psalms were "prepared, under superhuman influence, for Jesus the son of David"[1] and that, read without this thought, "they are petrifactions for a linguistic museum."[2] Some correction of this extreme position may, however, be found in a passage which he quotes approvingly in a footnote to his own words: "It is not *only* that marvellous fullness and diversity of human utterance,

[1] *Witness of the Psalms to Christ*, p. 37. [2] *Idem*, p. 39.

that profound spirituality, that exquisite refinement and tenderness of pathos, which strike a responsive chord in our inmost being, that have made the Psalter our most cherished manual of secret devotion, the most familiar and universal organ of our public praise. It is this, but it is more than this; their inspired sympathy with every phase of the Redeemer's lifelong Passion, with every sentiment of the Heart which gathered up and recapitulated in Itself the collective heart of humanity, has made the songs of Israel the rightful heirloom and common ritual of Christendom." [1]

These words which Bishop Alexander quotes may be more readily accepted than his own. They do not deny the meaning and value of the Psalms as the expression of some spiritual experience of those who wrote them which has a direct appeal to our own hearts. They recognise that it is because of this that they express the experience of the Redeemer, for in His experience that of the collective heart of humanity is gathered up and recapitulated. They suggest, however, that such Psalms were written with this purpose. It may not have been consciously in the mind of the Psalmists but it was in the mind of the Holy Spirit by whom they were inspired. This is the theory of a "double meaning" which has been widely held. But there is no need to adopt this theory to explain the facts. There is one meaning in the Psalms which is more fully and clearly perceived as the development of the Divine purpose in history proceeds. The Psalms point to Christ, not by predicting incidents of His earthly career, or

[1] Oxenham: *Catholic Doctrine of the Atonement*, pp. 295-6.

by revealing beforehand the experiences of His inner life, but by expressing hopes which only He could fulfil and by setting forth ideals which none but He could perfectly realise.

At first sight there may seem to be some ground for objection to this view in the way quotations from the Psalms are directly applied to Christ in the New Testament, but if a careful and detailed examination of these passages is made the objection cannot be sustained. It was perfectly natural that a devout Jew, who was thoroughly familiar with the Psalms from their use in the services of the Temple and the Synagogue and also in private and family prayer, should fall back on their phraseology to express either his faith or his experience or even to illustrate the significance of facts he was relating. In this way the eighteenth verse of the 22nd Psalm is quoted in the story of the Crucifixion.[1] Such a quotation does not imply that the Psalm was written in order to describe the event any more than the quotation of the eighth verse by the priests [2] implies that it was written to provide them with gibes to fling at their victim. The words "that it might be fulfilled" are the ordinary Jewish formula of quotation, and were used in a similar way to that in which we introduce a poetical reference with some such words as "as the poet says." This 22nd Psalm contains several other passages which are remarkably in accord with the details of the narrative of the Crucifixion, as, for instance, the sixteenth verse, but its closest association with that sacred story lies in the fact that it was in our Lord's mind as He hung

[1] John xix. 24. [2] Matt. xxvii. 43.

there in His suffering, and from it came the words which reveal the depths of His agony: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It is this that makes it so sacred for us. We may believe that the Psalm was written by some devout poet who, either through personal experiences or national experiences which he shared in their intensest form, had realised the mystery of suffering for righteousness' sake. He was writing of what he knew and felt, not merely imagining what another would know and feel in the distant future; not writing, as Bishop Alexander puts it, "under superhuman influence for Jesus the son of David." But now that Christ has come and entered more profoundly into that mystery of suffering for righteousness' sake than the Psalmist possibly could, and seeing that He used the Psalmist's words to express His own experience, we cannot use the Psalm without thinking of Him, and the thought of its original meaning falls entirely into the background.

So it is also with some portions of the 69th Psalm. When we read such verses as:

For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up;
And the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.[1]

They gave me also gall for my meat;
And in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,[2]

our minds are inevitably drawn to the New Testament records and we recognise that the experience of hatred and persecution of which the whole Psalm speaks was fully realised in the life of our Lord.

[1] Ps. lxix. 9; cf. John ii. 17 and Romans xv. 3.
[2] Ps. lxix. 21; cf. Matt. xxvii. 34, 48.

But there are utterances in the Psalm which we can never put into His mouth. The fifth verse confesses foolishness and sin and from the twenty-second to the twenty-eighth verses we have one of those passionate cries for vengeance which presents a vivid contrast to the attitude of Him who prayed for His murderers: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Bishop Alexander (and others of whom we take him to be an outstanding representative) does not hesitate to argue that these words are also to be read as if spoken by Christ, but all such argument is as unconvincing as it is unnecessary for the Christian use of the Psalm.

Leaving aside many other passages in the Psalms which are quoted, or referred to, in the New Testament and of which the New Testament application is often, for us, of more interest and importance than the original meaning, let us now consider the prophetic element in the Psalms from the broader point of view indicated by the title of this chapter.

Our preceding chapter has shown that the Psalmists, in common with the Prophets and all devout Israelites, believed in a divine purpose running through history and looked for the ultimate realisation of that purpose in a world-wide Kingdom of God with Jerusalem as its centre. It was this great hope that buoyed the heart of the nation in times of storm and trouble and, inevitably, it found a large place in the prayers and praises of the Psalmists. Against the dark background of strife and persecution their inspired imagination saw the glowing picture of a golden age of peace and happi-

ness which was yet to come. Starting from the ground of some event which had just taken place, or was immediately in prospect, they often soared into the realm of the ideal and saw the future in "the light that never was, on sea or land."

The establishment of this glorious Kingdom of God is often conceived as taking place without the intervention of any Messianic King, but solely by the action of God Himself. One group of six Psalms (xciii. and xcvi.-c.) is entirely occupied with this theme. It has been suggested, by Dr Briggs and others, that these Psalms originally formed part of one great hymn celebrating the advent of Jehovah as the King of His people. Probably they were composed to celebrate some actual event in which the Divine sovereignty had been gloriously manifested, and it is most likely that this event was the return from the Babylonish captivity. It may well be that, at the time, this event was actually regarded as the beginning of the new age which had so long been looked for. Dr Kirkpatrick says: "It was in truth a great 'day of Jehovah'; and if in eager faith Prophets and Psalmists spoke of it as though the final revelation of His power had already come, they did but speak as the prophets of an earlier age who looked for the Messiah as the Deliverer from the troubles of their own day, or the Apostles who anticipated the Return of the Lord in their own lifetime. They foreshortened the perspective of the glorious vision that was presented to their view, and it was only as years rolled on that men learned that the purposes which are eternally present to the mind of God

can only be realised on the stage of the world's history by slow degrees."[1]

Occasionally, however, there comes into these pictures of the new age the figure of a great king, and though it is possible that some reigning monarch may be in view, the language used concerning him is so charged with all the associations of the ideal kingship, for which Jewish patriots and prophets always looked, that it reaches far beyond the best that could be said of any earthly king. Later Judaism certainly regarded these Psalms as prophetic of the coming Messiah. Perhaps, in collecting them and preparing them for use in public worship, some editors did not hesitate to add a touch here and there to emphasise their prophetic character. The Christian Church has entered into the heritage of this Jewish tradition and naturally appropriates the language of these Psalms to her Lord. Whether we regard them as Messianic in their original intention or not, we recognise the spiritual fulfilment of the conceptions they set forth in Christ and in Him alone.

Of these Psalms the most important are the 2nd and the 110th. It is extremely difficult to find any reference in either of these Psalms to one of the historical kings. No doubt they arose out of some definite historical situation for, however imaginatively he may treat it, experience gives the poet the matter of his song. But the king who is described in these Psalms appears to be wholly ideal and, therefore, to be identified with him whom later Judaism designated "Messiah." Of the 2nd Psalm Dr Briggs says: "The Psalm is Messianic

[1] *The Psalms*, p. 563.

because it presents a world-wide dominion of the Son of David, such as was not a historical reality in the time of the poet or in any previous or subsequent time in history, but remains an ideal at the goal of history. Jesus of Nazareth is represented in the New Testament as the Son of David and heir of this ideal. God at his baptism recognised him, 'Thou art my beloved Son' (that is, Messianic Son) and at his transfiguration. In his reign from heaven over the world he is gradually fulfilling it. When he ascended into heaven and sat down on the right hand of God, he was installed as Son of God in his world-wide dominion as Messiah."[1] The conceptions of the Messianic king expressed in this Psalm are frequently referred to in the New Testament and applied to Christ.

The 110th Psalm refers to a military ruler who is called to share the throne of God and to whom is given a priesthood, not of the hereditary order of Aaron's line, but of a more primitive type, exemplified by Melchizedek, who was both priest and king. Many modern commentators have seen, in the combination of the kingly and priestly offices, evidence that one of the Maccabean princes is referred to, but the Maccabeans were born priests of the house of Aaron and only attained kingship afterwards. Our Lord quoted this Psalm on the assumption of the Jewish belief that it was written by David and, though no question of His divine character and authority is involved in His acceptance of a current tradition, there seems to be no valid reason to deny that David is at least regarded

[1] I.C.C. Psalms, Vol. I. p. 13.

as the speaker by the author of the Psalm. But the words of this Psalm pass beyond the loftiest conceptions that could possibly be entertained of the monarchy of David and are only appropriate if used of that ideal King for whom the Jews hoped and prayed and whom we have found in Jesus Christ.

In the 72nd Psalm an earthly monarch is definitely in view. The occasion of the Psalm is his accession to the throne and its prayer is that he may be endowed with justice and rule righteously, saving the poor who have hitherto been downtrodden and oppressed, so that prosperity may attend his reign and his name be for ever honoured. Such a prayer might fittingly have been offered for almost any king who came to the throne of Israel. But, in the middle of the Psalm, the poet breaks away from the limitations and conditions which circumscribe the rule of the particular king for whom he has been praying, and speaks of a world-wide dominion and an eternal reign of boundless prosperity.[1] Here again there is a blending of the ideal with the actual and it is the ideal element by which the Psalm lives and becomes the vehicle not only of the expectations and aspirations of successive generations of devout Jews, but also of the grandest and most far-reaching hope of the Christian Church :

> " Jesus shall reign where'er the sun,
> Doth his successive journeys run.
> His Kingdom stretch from shore to shore
> Till suns shall rise and set no more."

[1] Dr Briggs considers verses 8-12 to be the addition of an editor who adapted the original accession prayer for congregational use by giving it a Messianic significance. Some others take the same view but differ slightly as to the verses which form the addition.

Another Psalm which has often been regarded as referring to the Messianic King is the 45th, but here there is good reason for hesitation. The Psalm is quite evidently a royal marriage song. It is impossible now to identify the king and the princess for whose wedding it was written, but various plausible conjectures have been made by different commentators. The language used seems to us to transcend that which might suitably be employed of the most splendid earthly monarch, though probably most of it does not surpass that which a poet might adopt when speaking of an actual king in the light of the noblest ideals of Davidic monarchy. But the sixth verse certainly goes beyond this :

> " Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever :
> A sceptre of equity is the sceptre of thy kingdom."

There is, however, some question as to whether this verse is correctly translated.[1] The margin of the R.V. renders it :

> " Thy throne is the throne of God for ever end ever,"

which makes it a reminder to the king that he governs by divine authority according to the covenant made with David and his house.[2] The passage is quoted in the Epistle to the Hebrews [3] to illustrate Christ's superiority to the angels, but the alternative rendering suits the argument there which, as Bishop Westcott has pointed out, lies " in the description

[1] Dr Briggs suggests that this verse and the first half of the next is an addition made by an editor after the Psalm had begun to be used in a Messianic sense.

[2] Cf. 2 Sam. vii. [3] Heb. i. 8.

which is given of the Son's office and endowment." [1] The quotation in Hebrews, however, shows that, in any case, the writer of that Epistle regarded the Psalm as having a Messianic reference and there can be little doubt that the Jewish Church preserved it and used it on such an understanding. But this is really an example of the method of allegorising rather than an instance of prophecy. Marriage was a common figure of speech, in the Old Testament, to describe the relation of God to His people, and such usage made it easy to read a mystical interpretation into this Psalm as into the Song of Songs. The Apostle Paul [2] followed the same method in using marriage as "signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church." In the light of that figure of speech, which has become an integral part of our religious thought, we read the royal epithalamium of the 45th Psalm and find in it a witness to Christ without assuming that to have been originally intended by its author.

This allegorical method of interpretation accounts for several of the applications of passages from the Psalms to Christ which we find in the New Testament, and sometimes the comparison depends on a familiar but inaccurate rendering of the Hebrew in the Greek version of the Old Testament.[3] The application of the 8th Psalm to Jesus, in the 2nd chapter of Hebrews, is an instance in which this is done without any real strain being put on the original meaning. The Psalm was not thought to be Messianic by the Jews. It expresses the true idea

[1] Commentary on Hebrews, p. 26.
[2] Cf. Eph. v. 23 ff.
[3] See p. 104 (footnote).

of man and suggests his exaltation. The Epistle to the Hebrews uses the words to illustrate the humiliation of Christ as the Son of God, but it is not in any way inappropriate to apply the words to Him in Whom the highest ideal of man was perfectly realised. Such a method, however, does open the door to dangerous excesses and we may recognise the absurdities into which it led men when it became the prevailing method of interpretation by a single illustration from this Psalm. Cassiodorus, a literary theologian of the sixth century, who had learned this method of interpretation from the Fathers, carries it out consistently in this Psalm, and having read the sixth verse as referring to the dominion of Christ, proceeds to explain the "sheep" of the following verse as meaning those whose business in the Church is to learn rather than to teach, the "oxen" as those who labour in word and doctrine, the "fowl of the air" as the saints who rise above the world, and the "fish" as ordinary Christians, born of water and the Holy Ghost.[1]

To conclude our brief consideration of a very large subject, let us clearly recognise that it is not in striking coincidences of language or event, nor in suggestive analogies and illustrations, still less in the possibilities of allegorical interpretations, that the real interest and importance of the subject lies. The prophetic character of the Psalms arises from the fact that the whole of the Old Testament is one great prophecy. "There is positively not one New Testament idea that cannot be conclusively shown to be a healthy and natural product

[1] Quoted by Davidson: *Praises of Israel*, p. 203.

of some Old Testament germ, nor any truly Old Testament idea which did not instinctively press towards its New Testament fulfilment."[1] The Psalms contain the spiritual essence of the Old Testament. The Law and the Prophets, the providential history of the people, the ritual of worship and sacrifice, the piety and faith of generations, have all contributed to make them what they are. The deepest and most universal needs of the human heart, the loftiest and most sacred aspirations of the individual soul, and the sublimest hopes of a God-conscious and a God-guided people, are all expressed there. But they are all expressed as unfulfilled; they point onward. Where shall the answer to them be found? We who have the New Testament bound up with the Old in one sacred volume have not far to look. The interpretation of the problems which perplexed the faith of the Psalmists, the satisfaction of the needs which burdened their hearts, the fulfilment of the hopes which inspired their souls—they are all found in Christ and His Kingdom of Grace.

[1] Schultz: *Old Testament Theology*, Vol. I. p. 52.

Chapter X

THE HYMN-BOOK OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

"The universal Church of Christ has given its witness that these Psalms are not made for one age, but for all ages; not for one place, but for all places; not for one soul but for all souls."—Edward Irving.

CHAPTER X

THE HYMN-BOOK OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH

We approached the Book of Psalms as the Hymn-book of the Jewish Church, and before we leave it we would realise the claim it has to be regarded as the oldest and universal Hymn-book of the Christian Church. From this book our Lord and His disciples sang at the Last Supper. Their hymn would consist of Psalms cxiii.-cxviii., which the Jews knew as the Hallel and sang at all their great festivals.[1] From this book also the hymns which Paul and Silas sang in the Philippian gaol were doubtless learned. To this same book James probably refers, when he recommends the cheerful to sing praise,[2] and Paul, when he exhorts the Colossian Christians to teach and admonish one another "with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs."[3] In the glimpse of the informal gatherings of the early Church that the Epistle to the Corinthians gives us[4] we find that to sing a Psalm was one familiar method of contributing to the fellowship of devotion, and the indirect allusions to the Psalms, as well as direct quotations from them, in the New Testament, show how deeply their phraseology had become interwoven with the very

[1] See p. 21.

[2] Jas. v. 13. The A.V. rendering "sing Psalms" is probably correct as an interpretation but not as a translation.

[3] Col. iii. 16.

[4] 1 Cor. xiv. 26.

texture of the minds of these writers and how profoundly the spirit of them had entered into their religious life.

No doubt the early Church had some hymns of its own, such as the Canticles of St Luke's Gospel, the songs of the Apocalypse and others of which some fragments are probably to be recognised in the Epistles,[1] but the Psalter remained the only hymn-book of the Church for many centuries. The triumph of the allegorical method of interpretation assisted the natural tendency to retain the use of the hymns which had been so dear to the Jewish founders of the Church. The Psalms were everywhere sung by Christians, at public worship, in private devotion and amid the ordinary engagements of life. In the works of Augustine, who lived during the latter part of the fourth and the early part of the fifth centuries, there is abundant evidence of the prominence of the Psalms in the worship of the Church. Writing during the same period, Jerome says: "The labourer, while he holds the handle of the plough, sings Alleluia: the tired reaper employs himself in the Psalms; and the vinedresser, while lopping the vines with his curved hook, sings something of David. These are our ballads in this part of the world; these are our love songs."

After this period, for at least a thousand years, the whole Psalter had to be recited every week by every ecclesiastic, and there were thousands of monks who recited it every day. Theodoret, a Church historian of the fifth century, remarked that while there was great ignorance of the Scriptures

[1] Cf. 1 Tim. iii. 16; Eph. v. 14.

generally, even uneducated people could repeat Psalms by heart. Long before the Bible was translated into the common tongue of Christian peoples the Psalms were given to them in their own languages, and long after translations of the whole Bible were completed, the Psalms remained the only portion of it that was widely known. The influence that these translations have had upon life and history is incalculable. These translations were meant, however, for private use. During the Middle Ages, the version of the Latin Vulgate was used in the services of the Church and the chanting of the Psalms was left to priests and choirs.

With the Reformation the opportunity came once more for the unlearned to take part in the praise of the sanctuary and the singing of the Psalms by the congregation became the rule. Luther tried to retain the custom of chanting from the old Latin Psalter while he introduced hymns in the language of the people, including versions of some of the Psalms which were generally fresh renderings of their ideas rather than strict paraphrases. But in all other branches of Protestantism than the Lutheran Church, the Book of Psalms in the vernacular was recognised as the only hymn-book to be used in public worship.

On the continent the method of chanting was at once abandoned by the Reformed Church and metrical versions of the Psalms came into general use. Clément Marot translated many Psalms into French verse, and though at first they were sung by Catholics as well as Protestants, their use soon became the special mark of the Huguenots and did much to spread that faith throughout the land.

Originally set to popular ballad tunes (though music was specially composed for them before long) they were sung in court and camp, in homes and prisons, on battlefields and scaffolds where the martyrs suffered for their faith. After Marot's death, Calvin asked his colleague, Théodore Beza, to complete the version, and in 1552 he published the Genevan Psalter, which at once became the hymn-book of the Reformed Church.

Many editions of this Psalter were published, with tunes of various origin. Amongst them there were from the first some with harmonised tunes, though the use of these was not allowed in public worship. Three such editions were composed by Goudimel, a celebrated musician of the time, who had a more celebrated pupil in Palestrina. His connection with the Genevan Psalter cost him his life, for, though it is very doubtful if he was ever a Protestant, he was killed at Lyons in the massacre of St Bartholomew's Day, 1572.

The immense popularity of the music set to the Genevan Psalter led to many translations being made of it in French metres and its use spread to Germany and the Low Countries, to Italy and Spain, and to England and Scotland.

The growing use of English translations of the Genevan Psalter and of other metrical versions of the Psalms in English, such as those of Sternhold and Hopkins, led the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to arrange for the preparation of a complete metrical version, which was published in 1564. Of this there were a good many reprints and revisions, but in 1650 a new Psalter, based largely on

an English version of the Psalms which Francis Rous had made a few years earlier, was issued and authorised as "the only paraphrase of the Psalms of David to be sung in the Kirk of Scotland," and this version has continued in use until now.

In England the history of Psalmody after the Reformation was somewhat different. The English Church retained the method of the old Latin chanting in setting music to its new Prayer Book, and it was not therefore necessary to adopt metrical versions of the Psalms to enable them to be sung in public worship. Nevertheless many metrical versions of the Psalms were made in English and, though intended chiefly for private use, they were permitted to be sung in public worship in addition to the chanting of the Psalms appointed by the Prayer Book. In the Act authorising the First Prayer Book of Edward VI (1549) there is this proviso: "That it be lawful . . . in churches . . . chapels or oratories to use openly any Psalme or prayer taken out of the Bible . . . not letting or omitting thereby the service or any part thereof mentioned in the said book." Ten years later, in the reign of Elizabeth, this permission was reaffirmed and apparently extended so as to include original hymns[1] besides paraphrases of the Psalms and other portions of Scripture:

> "For the comforting of such as delight in music, it may be permitted that in the beginning or end of Common

[1] It may be that "hymn" in this Injunction of Elizabeth only means a metrical Psalm as against one that had to be chanted, but the stipulation in the Act of Edward VI that the composition was to be taken from the Bible is not repeated.

Prayer either at Morning or Evening, there may be sung an hymn or such like song to the praise of Almighty God in the best melody and music that may be devised, having respect that the sentence of the hymn may be understood and perceived."

Advantage was taken of this permission so far as singing Psalms were concerned,[1] but not many original hymns were available for the purposes of public worship. Six were published as an Appendix to Sternhold and Hopkins' Psalter in 1561, and through their attachment to that popular book these were sometimes sung in public. The first real attempt at an English hymn-book was not made until 1623, when George Wither published his *Hymns and Songs of the Church*, but that also was issued as an Appendix to the Psalms.

The Puritan revolution, which began immediately after this, hindered the adoption of the practice of singing original hymns in the services of the Church and left Nonconformists to introduce it more than a century later. The ancient liturgical service, with its chanting of Psalms and Canticles, was suppressed and the singing of the Psalms in metrical versions became the only part of public worship in which the congregation audibly shared. At the Restoration the English Church returned, of course, to the use of the Prayer Book, but continued to sing from

[1] In March, 1560, Jewel, the Bishop of Salisbury, wrote :—" As soon as they had once commenced singing in public, in only one little church in London, immediately not only the churches in the neighbourhood, but even the towns far distant, began to vie with each other in the same practice. You may now sometimes see at Paul's Cross, after the service, six thousand persons, old and young, of both sexes, all singing together and praising God."

metrical versions of the Psalms. The "New Version" by Tate and Brady was published in 1696 and was "permitted to be used in churches" as an alternative to the "Old Version" which, though the work of at least twelve hands, is commonly spoken of as that of Sternhold and Hopkins.

Many other metrical versions of the Psalms have since been made in English, but they have not had very wide influence, except as they have contributed to hymn-books of a modern character which include original compositions. The practice of chanting Psalms and Canticles in the words of the Prayer Book or Authorised Version now obtains in many churches besides the Anglican, and in every hymn-book that is in general use there may be found selections from the many metrical versions of the Psalms that have been made. But beyond this, the influence of the Psalter may be recognised in all the best hymns which are at our disposal, and we may be sure that it cannot cease to shape the language and chasten the spirit of the hymns yet to be written if they are to gain an abiding place in the worship of the Church. Whatever hymn-books may come and go, the Book of Psalms will not be ousted from its place so long as the Christian Church remains.

The constant use of the Psalms by the Christian Church has brought them into close and intimate association with the story of individual lives, the record of human institutions and the history of peoples and nations. As they come to us now they carry with them the memory of innumerable incidents in which they have played an important part,

and a great host of men and women to whom they have brought light and hope, comfort and strength. The Book of Psalms has been likened to one of those ancient manuscripts called palimpsests, in which, to save the cost of material, a new book has been written over the old one. Over the original words of the Jewish saints may now be read many a story of heroism and devotion, many a record of great epoch-making events and many a tragedy of quiet and obscure lives. Some of these stories have been collected by Dr Ker in *The Psalms in History and Biography* and by R. E. Prothero (Lord Ernle) in *The Psalms in Human Life*. In those two books most of the incidents alluded to in the following paragraphs and very many more are described.

One of the most moving stories written over the pages of the Book of Psalms is the story of persecution. It begins with the early Church and continues through the ages until it includes some of the missionary heroes and martyrs of our own time. In the words of the 115th Psalm: "Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands," etc., early Christian martyrs defied the order to sacrifice to the image of the Emperor. In the time of Julian, a noble Roman lady named Publia was cruelly beaten for singing the same words. With words of the Psalms upon their lips the early Christians frequently faced the savage beast in the arena or the still more savage executioner in the torture-chamber. At Soissons, during the persecution under Diocletian in the year 288, two brothers who were shoemakers, named Crispin and Crispinian, comforted themselves under the torture which

preceded their death with the words of the 79th Psalm :

" Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name :
And deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake.
Wherefore should the heathen say, Where is thy God?" etc.

This Psalm was also sung by fourteen Protestants of Meaux as they went to their death in the flames, and by other martyrs of the sixteenth century.

Luther, who was always a great lover of the Psalms and wrote lectures and commentaries upon them, besides making memorable translations of some of them, found great help and comfort from them in his darkest and most difficult days. The best known of all his hymns, " Ein' feste Burg," which Heine called " the Marseillaise Hymn of the Reformation," was originally published under the title " The 46th Psalm " and the first verse of the Psalm was quoted as its motto. It is familiar to us in the rugged translation of Thomas Carlyle :

" A safe stronghold our God is still,
A trusty shield and weapon ;
He'll help us clear from all the ill
That hath us now o'ertaken.
The ancient Prince of Hell
Hath risen with purpose fell ;
Strong mail of Craft and Power
He weareth in this hour,
On earth is not his fellow."

It was, no doubt, to this hymn that Luther referred when, in hours of great gloom and distress, he would say to his friend, Melanchthon, " Come, Philip, let

us sing the 46th Psalm." On one occasion he sent a fresh translation of the 37th Psalm to his friend, and in the letter which accompanied it he wrote: "Do not be troubled in spirit; but sing the Lord's song in the night, as we are commanded, and I shall join in." It is significant that this letter closes with the words: "In the region of the birds who sing beautifully on the trees, praising God day and night with all their might." [1]

Luther's favourite Psalm, however, was the 118th. He wrote a commentary on it in his solitude at Coburg. In a letter to Abbot Friedrich of Nürnburg, to whom he dedicated this commentary, he says: "Having searched my possessions, which are my riches, I have selected my dear psalm, the lovely Confitemini, and committed my thoughts on it to paper as I sit idle in my desert . . . I present and dedicate these thoughts to you, for I have nothing better. . . . It is the Psalm which I love. Although the Psalter and Holy Scripture are all dear to me, being my only consolation and life, still I am specially attached to this Psalm. For it has helped me out of many a sore trouble when the help of emperor, kings, learned men, saints, etc., was of no avail. And it is dearer than any riches or honour that Pope, Turk, or Emperor, or all the world could bestow on me; indeed, I would not exchange it for them all put together." [2]

It was the same with English Reformers who suffered for their faith. Bishop Hooper, committed to a "vile and stinking chamber" in the Fleet, with

[1] *Letters* translated by M. A. Currie, pp. 74, 77.
[2] *Idem*, pp. 228-9.

nothing but a "little pad of straw" for his bed and a "rotten covering," occupied his time by writing expositions of several Psalms. And all through his eighteen months' imprisonment he sustained his soul, and sought to comfort others to whom he wrote, by the Psalms, until at last he met death triumphantly at the stake. Bishop Ridley, who was burnt in the town ditch at Oxford, had the 101st Psalm ("I will sing of mercy and judgment") for his favourite and used often to expound it to his household. The night before his execution, when his brother offered to stay with him, he declined the offer, saying that he meant to go to bed and sleep as quietly as he ever did in his life. Then he quoted the words "I will lay me down in peace, and take my rest: for it is thou, Lord, only, that makest me dwell in safety."[1]

But it was not to the members of one party or creed only that the Psalms belonged. When the tide turned and Protestants who had not learned the principles of Christian liberty persecuted the Roman Catholics, inscriptions were left on the walls of some of the dungeons of the Tower of London which remain until this day to show the power of the Psalms to comfort and sustain those who suffered for conscience sake. And in the story of Robert Southwell, a Jesuit and an Elizabethan poet, who, after enduring torture thirteen times rather than betray a companion, was hung, drawn and quartered at Tyburn, the influence of the Psalms is revealed as clearly as in the case of any Protestant martyr.

The Puritan revolution of the seventeenth century

[1] Ps. iv. 9 (P.B.V.).

brought the Psalms into great and wide-spread popularity in England. In the metrical versions which then prevailed they were sung at Lord Mayors' feasts and City banquets; by soldiers on the march and ploughmen in the fields; in halls and palaces and in the humblest homes of the land. England became a Psalm-singing nation and when the liberty to sing Psalms was presently denied, many men and women were found ready to cross the seas and found a new state in which they could worship as they desired. To the singing of Psalms the *Speedwell* and the *Mayflower* set sail, and to such music the great fabric of the United States of America was built up.

Those who remained to fight the battle of liberty in their own land were not behind the others in their use of the Psalms. The flower of Puritanism may be recognised in the life and work of three men —Milton, Bunyan and Cromwell. Milton took a hand in the business of translating Psalms and his version of the 136th Psalm, made when he was only fifteen years old, is not likely to lose its place in the hymn-books of the Church. But throughout his poems there are allusions, direct and indirect, to the Psalms. Bunyan's great spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding*, shows how profoundly the Psalms had influenced his religious experience. As for Cromwell, the language of the Psalms is constantly on his lips. It is found in his letters and dispatches, in his speeches to Parliament and in his addresses to his soldiers on the field of battle. His use of the Psalms was stern; he made literal application of all the harsher metaphors he found there and he did

not shrink from adopting the language of imprecation against his enemies. It cannot be said that he read them in the gracious light of the New Testament, but he believed intensely that the position to which he had been called, and the work he had been given to do, was of Divine appointment, and that he was, therefore, warranted in appropriating the language of the Psalms as if it were spoken directly to his own condition and the needs of his own time.

As it was with the Puritans of England, so also it was with the Scottish Covenanters. Their annals tell of their constant use of the Psalms for comfort and inspiration, and not seldom for the denunciation of their persecutors. The Psalms gave them the battle-cry with which they went into conflict and provided the pillow on which the head of the martyrs was quietly laid for their last sleep.

But it is not only the martyrs who have found the preciousness of the Psalms in the hour of death. The words from the 31st Psalm with which our Lord gave up His spirit have been the last words to fall from the lips of hosts of His disciples. Amongst them were Stephen, Polycarp, Augustine, Bernard, Charlemagne, Thomas à Becket, John Hus, Luther, Melanchthon, Columbus, More, Fisher, Hooper, Ridley, Lady Jane Grey, George Herbert, John Knox, James Renwick, J. H. Newman, Henry Martyn, and many more known to history, besides hosts of others whose names have never been recorded in history or biography.

There are many other Psalms associated with the last moments of saintly men and women whose story has come down to us. Francis Xavier uttered with

his last breath the first verse of the 31st Psalm. Santa Teresa's last prayer was made in the words of the 10th, 11th and 17th verses of the 51st Psalm. John Wesley met death with the triumphant cry of the 7th verse of the 46th Psalm :

> "The LORD of Hosts is with us;
> The God of Jacob is our refuge."

His brother Charles spent some of his latest moments in meditating upon the 26th verse of the 73rd Psalm, and, turning his thoughts into verse, he dictated to his wife the last production of his unrivalled gift as a hymn-writer.

The 23rd Psalm has been the consolation of the last hours of many, Sir William Hamilton and Edward Irving among them.

From the lives of missionaries many other stories illustrating the consolation and encouragement which troubled and lonely souls have found in the Psalms may be gathered. John Eliot, the Apostle of the Red Indians, was one of the three principal authors of the first metrical version of the Psalms published in America, known originally as *The Bay Psalm Book*, and afterwards as *The New England Version of the Psalms*. He also made a metrical version of the Psalms in the dialect of the Indians of Massachusetts, and in singing these versions he found one of the most effective means of reaching the mind and heart of the people. Another great missionary to the Indians was David Brainerd, whose Journal, published by Jonathan Edwards, is a classic of devotional literature which to-day is far more often honourably mentioned than it is carefully read.

This book reveals the inner life of a man devoted to meditation and prayer both for himself and others. It is evident that an intimate and loving acquaintance with the Bible is the source of all his meditation and provides the language of all his intercessions, and no part of the Bible is so often in his mind as the Psalms. Every page of the Journal is steeped in their spirit and shows the impress of their phraseology. This is the kind of entry we constantly find:

"My soul was sundry times in prayer enlarged for God's Church and people. O that Zion might become the *joy of the whole earth*. It is better to wait upon God with patience than to put confidence in anything in this lower world. *My soul wait thou on the Lord; for from him comes thy salvation.*"

"My soul thirsted for grace, but, alas, how far was I from obtaining what I saw so exceeding excellent! I was ready to despair of ever being a holy creature, and yet my soul was desirous of *following hard after God.*"

"In the evening I was unexpectedly refreshed in *pouring out my complaint* to God; my shame and fear was turned into a sweet composure and acquiescence in God."

Brainerd's Journal had a great influence upon many of the famous missionaries of later days and, like him, some of them have left on record their witness to the power of the Psalms upon their hearts. Many instances may be found in the books previously mentioned or gleaned from the great missionary biographies. We will only now mention two. The first is that Livingstone's favourite text which, he said, sustained him at every turn of his life was

"Commit thy way unto the LORD and put thy trust in him; and he shall bring it to pass."[1]

The other we will give in an extract from a letter of James Gilmour of Mongolia. "About myself I have lots to be thankful for. I am mostly in the light, sometimes very sweetly. Sometimes, though, it is cold and dark; but I just hold on, and it is all right. . . . When I feel I cannot make headway in devotion, I open at the Psalms and push out in my canoe, and let myself be carried along in the stream of devotion which flows through the whole book. The current always sets towards God, and in most places is strong and deep."[2]

Upon that note this brief selection from a great store of testimonies as to the worth of the Psalms in Christian experience may well end. There is a great cloud of witnesses to encourage us to launch our frail bark on that stream of devotion which has flowed on through so many ages and carried so many souls to the haven where they would be. Or, to change the metaphor from a stream to a well, we may put the significance of the experience of men and women who have found refreshment and strength in the Psalms in the words of Dr Ker: "There are promises in the Bible which seem beyond our reach; we have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. But someone, like ourselves, has been there before us, and has left a cup to be let down with his name and story engraven on the rim: 'For this shall everyone that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found'."[3]

[1] Ps. xxxvii. 5. [2] Lovett: *James Gilmour*, pp. 280-1.
[3] Ker: *Psalms in History and Biography*, p. 10.

It is to such a use of the Psalms for our own individual life of devotion that all our study of their history, their teaching and their influence should lead. And, whatever differences our modern methods of approach may reveal between us and those who loved and cherished the Psalms in other days, there will be perfect agreement as to their real and abiding spiritual value. After all it is the insight born of spiritual experience which can alone lead to true appreciation and understanding. With that insight these ancient hymns, which came from the heart of a nation and express the heart of the faith which that nation held in trust for the world, are seen to glow with ever new light and fresh beauty. The point of view taken in this book is very different from that taken by Bishop Alexander in his learned and deeply devotional Bampton Lectures, but we may be allowed to take his closing words for ours: "The Psalter is not like a picture on canvas, upon whose surface only the light falls. It may rather be said to resemble a picture on glass, where the radiance of each day's sunshine is deeply interfused with the artist's work; where the design may be of remote antiquity, but the light and glow are of the living present."

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